


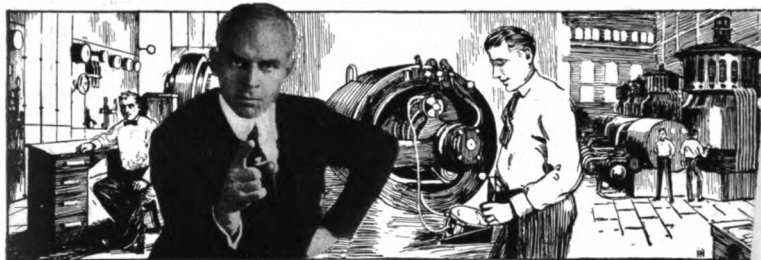
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Beginning
"The GIFT
of the DESERT"

By
RANDALL PARRISH

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WAYSIDE TALES

H. H. WINDSOR
Editor

T. C. O'DONNELL
Managing Editor

Volume 21

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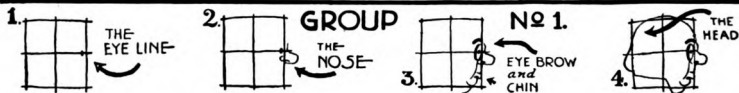
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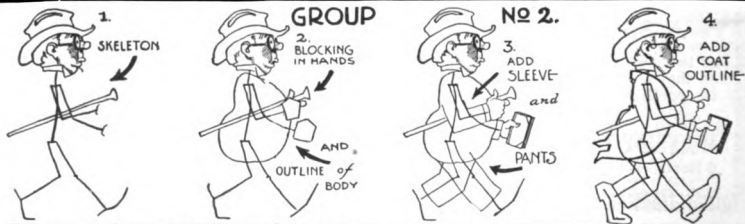
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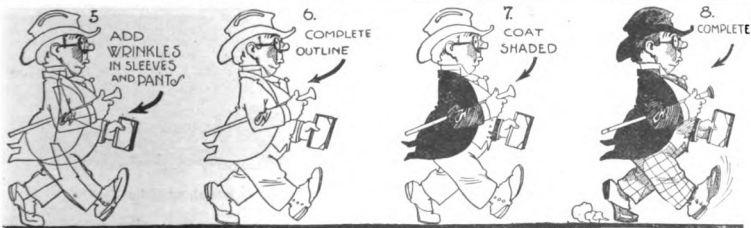
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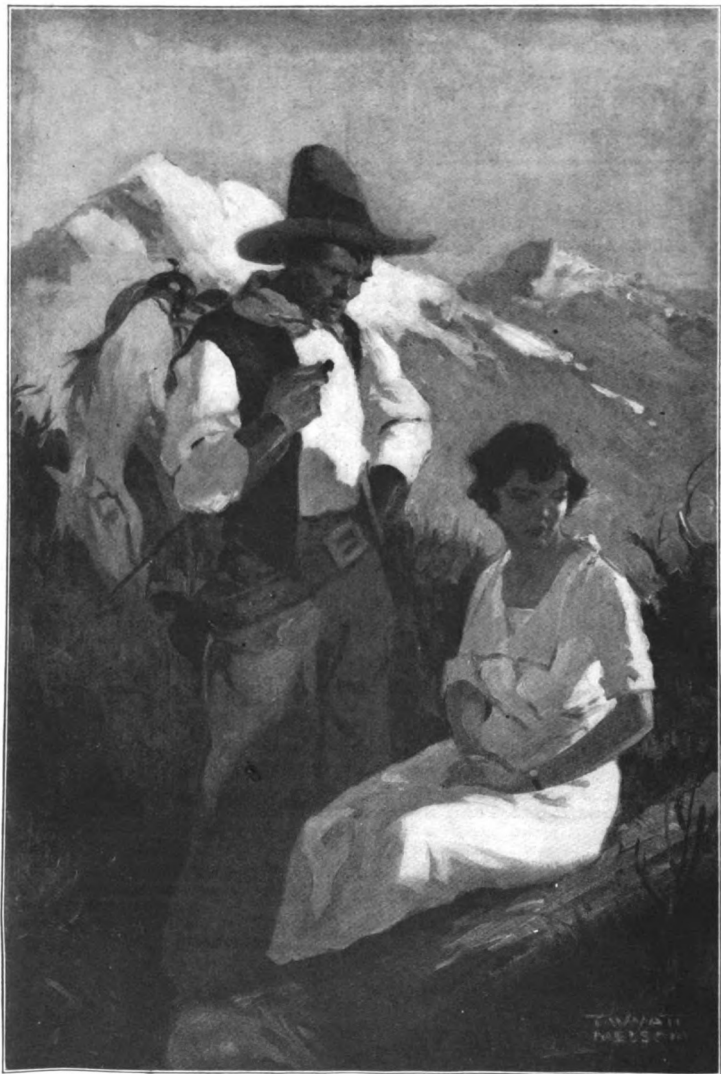
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(Additional names forwarded upon request)





"She took the place designated, realizing the utter uselessness of refusal, while he remained standing." (See page 7.)

WAYSIDE TALES

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT 6 N. MICHIGAN AVE., CHICAGO

Volume 21

FEBRUARY, 1922

Number 2

THE GIFT OF THE DESERT

*The First Installment of a Novel of Adventure
and Romance in the Southwest*

By Randall Parrish

Illustrations by T. Wyatt Nelson

IT WAS a wonderful thing to be twenty-three, full of hope and ambition, and in the wide out-of-doors; more wonderful still to possess the glorious memory of nearly two years in the hospitals of France, six months of that time just behind the American fighting line. Yet the girl was not thinking of this then, as she sat there alone at the edge of the ravine, gazing silently off across the dull leagues of desert to where a distant blue range of mountains cut off the view with their ragged summits.

It was a marvelous, somber scene stretched out below, a drear desolation, without movement or the slightest semblance of life. An hour ago it had been wrapped in heat waves, a misty miracle, sometimes appearing as a vast sea, but now, as the sun sank slowly behind those distant serrated peaks, darker shadows lay along the level surface, with gleams here and there of gray and red, while

arching over all hung the clear Arizona sky, slowly turning to purple.

Nor was she thinking of these magic changes. She had noted them all, appreciative of their beauty, and comparing that sun-kissed vista with other sunsets in France and Germany, when the ground was yet red in the blood of sacrificed manhood. Her heart ached still with the sad memory that would not die—hours of toil, scenes of suffering. But this mood had also passed away, and now, although her eyes were still upon that outspread picture below, her thought had centered upon the present in a dull wonderment at the strange situation surrounding her.

Why had she ever consented to come to this place—to this jumping-off spot of creation? Why had she ever listened to the plea of old Tom Meager, back there in Chicago, and finally, partially from pity, partially from that new love

of adventure engendered within her by service across the water, agreed to come West with him?

Of course, she never had dreamed what it really would be like—life on this vast isolated ranch along the southern border, with the drear desert stretching away on every side from this little oasis of water and grass. Tom Meager had never told the whole story; he had dwelt on the loneliness of his sick wife, the chance she had of regaining health, with proper nursing and care; the rare beauty of the sunsets, the wonderful glow of the cool desert nights, the wild, free existence of the range, filled with excitement and a dash of danger.

It all had appealed to her strangely—the service, the complete change in environment, the escape from the humdrum life of the Marine Hospital. The pay was good, the opportunity excellent, and she had said "yes" without half realizing then what it all might mean in terms either of danger or happiness.

But she realized now. Those first few weeks had been glorious, indeed. She found everything new, attractive, tinged with romance and color. She liked Mrs. Meager, and discovered her task to be an easy one, her time largely at her own disposal.

Then, so far as labor was concerned, the position was ideal; she was companion rather than nurse. But it was lonely, terribly lonely; and, after those first few weeks nothing seemed to occur to break the dull monotony. It was sixty miles over a half-obliterated desert trail to the nearest town, and that little more than a general store, and a cattle corral.

The only link between the place and the civilization she had left to the eastward, were the glistening rails of a railroad skirting the edge of the hills and vanishing amid the sand. Once or twice a day a train passed east or west, a wisp of smoke showing on the horizon, only to be quickly blown away by the never-ceasing wind.

DAY BY DAY, week following week, she saw the same faces, heard the same voices. Riders from the outer range came in with their reports, bringing tales of Mexican raiders, or of cattle strayed into the desert. Once a party of rangers rode by on the trail of a horse thief, and once again a squad of cavalymen from some frontier fort farther to the north camped overnight behind the stables. By dawn they were gone. Whenever she could she rode about with old Tom Meager, in and out the ravines, and occasionally far beyond into the vast sand plains, listening to his quaint tales of adventures, and helping him round up bunches of strayed stock. She became expert in the saddle, learned to use a gun skilfully, and even picked up some knowledge of the lariat. Thus, little by little, she had adapted herself to the rough life, determined to keep her word.

Then Tom Meager came to his death. Riding home alone from Nogales at night, in the dark of Silver Canyon, his horse slipped and fell, and Meager lay there on the rocks motionless. A packer found his body the next day, and brought it on to the ranch. In some way the message of the old man's passing crossed the border line down far into old Mexico, until it reached the ears of his son, God alone knows where. Three days after the burial this wanderer of many years returned, drove his saddle horse into the corral, and assumed control. Whatever might be his legal right, there was none to oppose his bold assumption of authority, or management. The widow lay helpless on her bed; she was not the boy's mother, and he never so much as crossed the threshold of her room. If there had been a will, no one searched for it, or made inquiries. By sheer force and audacity Bob Meager took command, asking permission of no one.

For some days after his arrival the girl did not even encounter this new master. She dared not leave her patient, day or night, and the man was never at the ranchhouse, except to fling himself on the

bed and sleep. From dawn to dark he was in the saddle, familiarizing himself with every detail of his new possessions. She had no desire to meet him, for long ago his story had been told to her—not by old Tom, who never spoke his son's name, or by the patient, invalid wife, but by others, long in the Meager service, glad now of an opportunity to gossip with a stranger. It was a story of brutal shame; of base ingratitude, verging on crime; of sudden disappearance; of vague rumors floating back from here and there, bearing the tale of a wild, disreputable life. To her, Bob Meager had become the synonym of all that was evil in this border land. Yet now, through some strange play of fate, he was here, and she was left helplessly in his power, under his orders, dependent on him for employment. The thought was almost maddening.

THEY finally met, the morning of the fifth day, unexpectedly, when, without even knocking, the fellow strode into the widow's room unceremoniously. The girl, in her nurse's uniform, arose hastily to her feet, and confronted the rude intruder indignantly, her eyes blazing with sudden antagonism. Meager came to a surprised halt, staring straight at her in astonishment.

"Who are you?" he asked gruffly, yet with a measure of doubt in the tone. "Some poor relative?"

"Not quite as bad as that," she answered, resenting his manner, yet endeavoring to control her speech. "I am Mrs. Meager's nurse."

"Nurse!" he sneered sarcastically. "Good Lord, so the old man stood for that, did he? Well, you can hardly expect me to; it is more than my mother ever had. Do you know who I am?"

"I presume you must be Robert Meager."

"You guessed right, and I've come back here to run this ranch; you get me?"

"Quite clearly—yes."

She spoke so coldly, with so little ap-

parent interest, as instantly to anger him.

"Oh, you do, hey? Then I'll enlighten you further. You're Mrs. Meager's nurse, you said? Pretty soft job, isn't it? I don't believe there will be any necessity for her having a nurse very long. What's your name?"

"Deborah Meredith."

He laughed, showing a row of cruel white teeth.

"Sounds like a story book; where did the old man pick you up?"

"My home is in Chicago."

"Well, he certainly showed good taste. I'll say that for him. You are some good looking, Deborah Meredith. I'm damned if I don't rather like your style."

He stared at her insolently, his glance appraising form and features much as he might take in the points of some animal he contemplated purchasing. The girl's face flushed indignantly, but her eyes never fell.

"You sure do look good to me," he announced finally, "and I don't believe I'll fire you—not yet, anyhow."

"It will not be at all necessary," she said quietly. "I shall attend to that for myself."

"You will? You mean you'll quit?"

"I certainly shall."

"Oh, hell! Spunky little tigress, ain't yer?"

"I reckon I'll have something to say about that."

"You mean you will compel me to remain whether I wish to or not?" she asked in surprise. "Why, that cannot be done; I am not a slave."

"It can't hey? Do you know where you are?"

"Certainly, I do."

"You do? I doubt it. This is the Meager ranch in Arizona. There ain't another outfit within fifty miles, an' nothin' else round us but desert; there ain't no water, an' no grass. I'm runnin' things yere, an' you bet I know how ter run 'em. There ain't no gay galute comin' in yere to tell Bob Meager what he shall do an' what he shan't do. You get me? I'm

the boss; before another week's out every white man on this ranch will be huntin' a job, an' there'll be Mex in their places.

"I sure know how to handle Mex; they'll do what I say—you bet they will. So, Miss Deborah Meredith, how is it you're goin' to quit before ever I say you can? Aim to hoof it across the alkali to Nogales? Ten miles o' that stuff would break your heart. You better think it over."

SHE stood erect, looking directly at him, fully realizing his power and ruthlessness, yet still unbelieving that this was more than a mere idle threat. She saw him now clearly in the light of the window, and, in spite of her natural courage, the girl's heart sank. Was there any act of brutality the man would be incapable of? He looked the very incarnation of force, of ungovernable, unrestrained temper. He was big, burly, with broad shoulders and a deep chest, almost a giant of a man, but it was the face which bespoke his character. Brute was written plainly all over it, seemingly imprinted on every feature, finding clearest expression in the bold, staring eyes and the bullying chin. Yet, at the moment, she did not fear him; instinctively she felt the coward skulking back of his brutishness, confident that in the end he would never dare execute his boast.

"I prefer," she said quietly, "not to discuss the matter now. Surely, this was not why you came in here?"

"I sure like your nerve, little girl," he admitted admiringly. "No, I didn't come exactly for that, but whatever brought me, I've changed my mind. We'll let things go on just as they are at present, I reckon. But don't you ever imagine I am a playin' with you; law don't count for much out yere, sister, an' what I say goes."

She watched him as he turned and went out the door, her hands clinched, a wave of intense hatred surging over her. Yet in another moment she had conquered

herself, and moved quietly back to the side of the bed on which her patient lay sobbing. She bent above the distressed woman.

"He is worse even than I thought," she said, unable to wholly hide her distress. "What caused him to come in here, do you suppose?"

"He came to send me away," answered the other, clasping the girl's hands. "I knew it would not be long; he has disliked me always."

"Send you away! Why, you were his father's wife. Even if there was no will you must have dower rights in the estate."

"Surely, that is the law."

"I—I do not know," wearily. "Tom never explained anything to me, but—but I am afraid of Bob Meager. You don't know him yet, but I do; he will rule or ruin."

"He is only a big, blustering coward," burst forth Deborah, indignantly, "bullying two women. I am not going to let him frighten me."

"Don't cross him; don't anger him," the other begged piteously. "He is dangerous just the same, and I am afraid of him, for your sake just as much as my own."

"What do you want me to do?" the girl questioned, influenced by the timidity of the other. "Let that beast have his own way with me?"

"No—no, not that. But—but treat him fairly, Miss Meredith. He will not always be as he is today. As he said, you cannot fight or run away. All depends on winning his favor. Then some time there will be a chance. We must wait and watch, until he is in a mood to let us both go."

"But even if there was a way for you to escape alone, you could not leave me here in his power."

"You fear him like that?"

"If I stand between the man and this fortune his father left, my life is worth nothing—I know that."

And Deborah Meredith, looking down

into the white face lying on the pillow, made her choice.

CHAPTER II

Meager States His Plan

IT WAS the memory of this scene—her promise to Mrs. Meager, and her dislike of Bob Meager—which left the girl unobservant of the desert view outspread below, and thoughtless of the descending night. She had sought this spot to be alone, to escape any possibility of encountering Bob, and to turn over once had made her virtually a prisoner in this more in her mind the conditions which man's hands.

That dreary expanse of desert had brought home afresh her helplessness, the brutal truth of his words. It was three days since the interview, but she had not again met the man during that interval. Whether he was deliberately avoiding her, or merely busied about the endless work of the ranch, she was unable to determine, yet the very indifference thus shown had its effect on her imagination. Apparently he was so absolutely sure of her safety he felt no necessity for even a guard over her movements, or any call to repeat his threat. She had been left free to come and go at her will, while he ignored her very existence.

Yet she could not accept this seeming indifference as real. There had been an expression in the man's eyes that had frightened her more than she would even confess to herself—an insolent boldness, a sneering dominance which haunted her memory with its sinister threat. He was playing with her as a cat plays with a mouse, biding the proper time to strike. He knew he could afford to wait; that she was utterly in his power. His very silence, and aloofness, increased her alarm, her dread of the morrow. Her dislike of the fellow had grown into a bitter hatred, while every change about the ranch seemed to draw the chains of captivity closer around her. His insolent

neglect left the impression that it also was a part of the game.

Not a day passed without witnessing a change in the personnel of the ranch. She might not have observed this, but for her own personal fear and suspicion. Old Tom Meager would never employ a Mexican on the place, nor trust them; but now, one by one, the old hands disappeared, while swarthy-skinned riders appeared mysteriously to take their places. Where they came from, how the word had been sent abroad, she could not surmise, yet every day she missed familiar faces, and discovered new ones about the bunkhouse. Even the old-time cook vanished finally, to be replaced by a Chinaman, while a Mexican girl appeared suddenly to assume charge of the ranch-house. Within six days the transformation was practically complete, and Bob Meager was surrounded by those of his own kind. Creatures of his will, denizens of that world he knew best.

This change was, to Deborah's mind, ominous of evil; it increased her fear, and rendered more difficult any possibility of escape. The walls closed her more tightly in. As she saw the strange faces and fanciful costumes of these new arrivals, and heard their native language spoken, she realized more and more vividly her own increasing helplessness, and shrank from confronting the future. What was the true meaning of all this? What did this man plan to do with her? The questions could not be answered; she could only wait fearfully for his actions to make reply. Yet it must be evil; she could conceive nothing else in Bob Meager's heart.

AGAIN and again the puzzled, troubled girl went over in memory every word the man had uttered, every act of his since he came. Her thought was not with the wild desert scene outstretched before her, or the beauty of that red sunset behind those far-off peaks.

She was not even conscious of her more immediate surroundings, remain-

ing totally oblivious to the solitary horseman, approaching along the barely discernible trail skirting the edge of the mesa. The horse was moving slowly, with wearily drooping head, and on the hard-beaten sand the hoofs made no noise sufficient to disturb her. The rider lolled in the deep Mexican saddle, with sombrero pulled down low over his eyes, seemingly as tired as the half-broken mustang he bestrode, and occasionally hectoring with a sharp spur.

The two climbed the steeper ascent leading up the side of the mesa, winding about among the mesquite, and finally emerging amid the chaparral above. It was on the farther edge of this that the horseman suddenly perceived the girl, her white skirt showing conspicuous in the purple light, and quickly held up his pony. A glow came into his tired eyes as he made sure of her identity, and he leaned forward over the pommel, watching her resting there motionless. She had evidently neither seen nor heard his approach, and he swung silently down from his saddle, dropping the mustang's rein over the animal's head, before advancing toward her on foot. It was not until he had come within a few yards of her position that Deborah became aware of some presence near, and arose instantly to her feet, facing him in sudden alarm. It was too late then to flee; the man blocked the only path available.

"Frightened you, did I?" he asked carelessly, flipping a weed with his quirt, but with searching eyes on her face. "You must have been in some day-dream, I'll say."

She caught her breath sharply in an effort at self-control.

"I—I was thinking," she answered, a little catch in the voice, but as instantly determining to tell the truth, and thus learn, if possible, his purpose, "of what you intended to do with me. I—I cannot continue to bear things as they are."

"Why, they are not so bad, are they?" he asked provokingly, but making no effort to advance. "This is the same ranch

to which you came voluntarily; I have not cut down your wages, and the food and all that is just as good. Do you mean you don't like it here any longer?"

"I certainly do not under the circumstances. I am no longer here of my own free will."

"Oh, is that it? Well, perhaps we can remedy that trouble. In fact, that is the very matter I rather wanted to talk to you about. It is mighty lucky I found yer out here all alone, where maybe we can come to an understanding. Sit down there again while we talk it over."

"I prefer to stand."

"All right then, only it ain't going to do you no good to be offish about it. I'll tell you that at the start. You ought to know by this time that I ain't the playin' sort. Found any way to leave yet? I reckon not, or you wouldn't be here. Well, that lesson ought to mean something to you. I've left you alone for three days now, just to let it sink in."

"That I could not escape from here without assistance?"

"Sure; there ain't no way for a woman—a tenderfoot—to get across that desert without help of some kind, and a horse."

"I reckon you are smart enough to know that. It was mostly on your account I sent them old punchers away an' got a lot o' Mex in to ride herd, an' do whatever odd jobs were needed. You ain't liable to pick up no friendships with that gang. Knew some of the old hands, didn't you?"

"A few," she admitted. "I rode about considerably at first."

"So I heard tell. Now there ain't nobody 'round who cares a whoop in hell what happens. You better let that fact soak in, too, first of all. Then it will be easier for us to come to an understanding."

"An understanding?" she asked in surprise. "You desire to explain, then? Yet first you threaten me?"

He laughed.

"Threaten, hell! I don't have to threaten; I'm holding all the cards."

HE TOOK a step forward, and, as the girl drew slightly back from his approach, his face quickly darkened with anger.

"You don't want me to touch you, hey? Or come near you? All right. I'll wait, but just the same you'll do just what I tell you to. Sit down there on that log. I've got quite a bit to say to you yet an' I don't want yer standing up there, starin' at me. You hear me? Sit down!"

She took the place designated, realizing the utter uselessness of refusal, while he remained standing, with one foot insolently planted on the log beside her. Through the gathering dusk she could see his face, and its expression was far from reassuring. He was brutally sure of his power.

"Very well," she said, forcing a strange calmness into her voice, "I will listen to what you have to say."

"Listen! I rather guess you will. I like your damn nerve, but you'll find out I've got some myself. Now, see here, Miss Deborah Meredith. A week ago I didn't even know you existed. But after we had that little seance together the other day in the old lady's room, I made up my mind that I was going to give you a lesson.

"You didn't like me, did you?"

He stopped, but she did not answer, although her eyes met his own.

"Come on, talk up! I know you didn't; but I want to hear you say so."

"It certainly is true."

"Sure it's true. Why in hell shouldn't it be? The old man had filled you full—"

"Your father never once spoke of you to me."

"Then my precious stepmother did."

"Only in reply to some questions, but nevertheless, I knew. I am not going to deny that I was prejudiced against you, and your conduct and words the other day were not likely to change my opin-

ion. If it is necessary for me to answer, I will—I do not like you, Bob Meager."

The man grinned almost cheerfully.

"Some fellows might get mad at that, but I don't. I rather enjoy it. Why? Because I've got you where it don't make any damn difference. That's why. As long as I want you, I'm going to have you.

"I knew exactly how you felt, and maybe that was what made me swear I'd have you anyhow. I don't care what you think o' me. Likely I'm even worse than that; but from the first minute I seen you in that white uniform, I made up my mind you was the girl I wanted. And I made up my mind, too, that it wasn't any use of my trying to make love to you—not a damn bit. You'd just laugh at that. So I went to work and figured out another way."

"To get me?"—in growing horror. "To get me? For what?"

"Oh, it's all going to be honorable, so don't let that worry you now. This is going to be a square deal, only I handle the cards—see? The first thing I had to do was to build a hog-tight fence around this ranch, so you couldn't get out. Nature helped some, for with forty miles of desert one way, and sixty the other, there wasn't much chance left. But I thought maybe you had made friends with some of those cowboys, and the safest way was to clean them all out, and get Mexican herders instead. They'll do whatever I say, and kick up no fracas. Well, there was plenty of that kind to be had, and now there ain't another white man left on the place. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," slowly, "I know that."

"It's worth thinking over; it means I'm the boss; that what I say here goes. I ain't been bothering you any meanwhile. I hain't spoken to you since that first time. There wasn't no use. I saw in your eye what sort o' girl you was, and just about what you thought o' me. But I'd made up my mind what I was after, and how I was going to get it. I didn't

have any notion of coming to you again until I had the cards stacked—see?”

“And—and now you—you are ready to play, and have come?”

“Correct. I can’t lose. You got to do what I say, whether you like it or not. Maybe you don’t just get this straight. Well, listen. In the first place I am Bob Meager, and, I reckon, you never heard nothin’ very soft about me. It’s pretty generally known around here that I am a he-man, and that I usually get what I go after. You know that, don’t you?”

“I—I have heard of your methods—yes.”

“I thought most likely you had. Well, that’s one point. I ain’t the kind to play soft with; when I get my hair up I’m a bear-cat. The second point is, I’m the real boss of this ranch; it’s mine, and I’ve got the papers to prove it. Now, do you get the picture?”

IT WAS almost dark, but she could still distinguish his face, as he leaned forward peering at her. There was no doubt as to the real meaning of the man, and she comprehended fully her own helplessness of resistance. All she could hope to do now was to cause delay, to thus win a chance to think and act. Her breath seemed to choke her, and almost prevent speech, and yet her mind desperately grasped at this one opportunity.

“Yes,” she managed to say, marveling at the calmness with which she spoke, and now on her feet facing him. “I think I know what you mean. You have me completely in your power; you have planned it all out, and now there isn’t a friend here whom I can call on for help, while no way of escape has been left open.

“That is what you want me to realize, I suppose.”

“That’s the ticket. Now there ain’t no use your gettin’ mad. I like you; I like you awfully well, and I’m going to be mighty square with you. But there wasn’t any other way for me to get you—was there?”

“No,” she said frankly, “there was no other course possible.”

“Which means you don’t like me at all?”

“It means all of that, and more, Bob Meager. I do not believe I ever despised any one so much in my life as I do you. I disliked you before I ever saw you; now I hate the very ground you walk on. Have you any use for me after that?”

“You just bet I have,” he grinned. “You’re such a wildcat, but I’ll tame you. Damn it! I like it in you; you’re not the wishy-washy kind. One of us has got to be boss; I saw that from the very first, and that’s what this means now; I’m going to be the one.”

“In what way do you mean?”

“Haven’t you got the idea yet? I’m going to marry you—see? I took the notion the first time I saw you—you’re exactly my style. But I know’d then there wasn’t but one way to do it. Now I’m ready to talk business. How is it, my lady—goin’ to be nice about it?”

She endeavored to rally her courage, even attempting a laugh.

“Marry you? Not in this world. I know you are a scoundrel, but I never thought you were a fool, before.”

“No, and you never will again,” his voice hardening. “Because you will have no chance. It is nothing to me whether you say yes or no. I been down in Nogales today, an’ among other things I got a marriage license. It’s right here in my pocket, an’ the names written in it are ‘Robert Meager’ and ‘Deborah Meredith.’ An’ that ain’t all: some time between now and ten o’clock a justice of the peace is goin’ to drive in here to do up the business for us. That’s why I’m telling you all this—so you can sorter brace up, an’ get ready.”

SHE made no attempt to move, or to speak; she seemed paralyzed, staring at him through the gathering darkness.

“I ain’t goin’ to touch you now,” he went on sullenly, angered by her silence.

"But you just think it over, an' go on back to the house. When I send for you, you better come; that's all."

He turned, and walked back to his horse, and she stood there, trembling in every limb, as he vanished amid the shadows.

CHAPTER III

The Message from the Bunkhouse

DEBORAH sank back upon the log, her eyes following the dim outline of the man's burly figure until it disappeared along the trail leading toward the ranchhouse. He did not mount the horse, but plunged forward on foot, the animal trailing behind. The sound of movement died away, and about her was impressive stillness. She could hear the rapid beating of her own heart, the grating as her fingers convulsively dug into the soft bark of the log. She understood now, clearly, definitely, just what she was called upon to face. Bob Meager had not minced his words, or left anything to imagination. He had been brutally frank, revealing his real nature in all he had said and done. She had no illusions; he had planned this deliberately, in cold blood, and he had the will, and, perhaps, the power, to carry it out.

At first she was in a white flame of indignation; she even laughed hysterically at the fellow's threat. It seemed preposterous, absurd, a dream of delirium. Marry him! Marry that degenerate brute! Why, she would rather die a hundred deaths than have him even touch her. She hated, despised him, and there flashed to her mind one memory after another of what had been told her of his past—cowardly, cruel deeds, spoken of in whispers; a shooting affray in Nogales; a woman deserted and left to die; an arrest for robbery somewhere in New Mexico; a duel over a gambling table; a rumor of gun-running across the Mexican border—these were but part of what she had heard before they ever met. Now

she read the truth pictured in the man's face and manner, and shrank from him in horror. He was a foul, brutal cur! Yet even as she realized this, shrinking in terror from any possible contact with him, there arose in her mind a sense of fear, a grim, persistent fear she could not conquer.

Bob Meager was ruthless, merciless. If he truly desired her, nothing would be permitted to stand in his way; he would hesitate at no crime in the gratification of aroused passion. He had not been drinking when he talked with her; he had spoken soberly and with full knowledge of what he said. Fiendish as it was, he had acted deliberately and in cold blood. That made it all the more dangerous, for he would likely drink now and become an utter fiend. Within an hour he would be raging drunk, capable of any indignity, any wild act. A brute sober, he became a demon drunk. And she must face it—alone! This was the conviction that slowly took full possession of her mind. At first she failed to wholly realize the situation. It seemed to be too outrageous to be possible, but gradually the bitter truth came home, leaving her stupefied and helpless. This was no dream, but a fact. His threat was not an idle one. He could turn contemptuously away and leave her there, completely confident that she could not escape. She was in his toils as utterly as though he had her locked in a room, or trussed her about with a rope's end. There was no spot of safety to which she could fly, no friend to whom she could appeal. Her apparent freedom was a mere mirage; she was a prisoner in a cell—her cell this isolated ranch, surrounded by leagues of impassable desert.

SHE gazed hopelessly out into the black void; not a light gleamed except from those distant stars overhead. How terribly desolate it all was, long miles of sand and alkali, with nothing to break the drear monotony except stunted greasewood and cactus, among which

wound the barely discernible trail. No glimmer of water, no shimmer of green, no animal or bird life amid the solitude. She remembered it all with a shudder, a deadening sense of facing the impossible.

There was but one way leading across that expanse, the single trail connecting with the pass through the mountain canyon beyond. There might, of course, be others — known to Indian or outlaw — but this path was the only one she ever had traveled. And it never could be traversed alone on foot. Perhaps if she had time in which to plan, to prepare, it might be done—food, water, a horse, a few hours start in the darkness, might lead to success—but Meager had given her no opportunity. If she plunged forth into that black, trackless void afoot, it would be to certain death, unless his cowboys found her in time. The thought promised nothing but suicide or recapture. She shrank back nerveless from the trial.

YET, was there any other hope of escape—of postponement even? To appeal to Bob Meager would accomplish nothing. She knew the base heart of the man now if she never had before; he would only laugh, whether she came to him with reproaches or tears. And there was no one else—not a single white man left on the estate to her knowledge; not an officer of the law nearer than Nogales. The justice of the peace who was coming out to marry them! . . . Whoever he was, he would assuredly be a creature of Meager's own choosing. Some despicable crony willing enough to obey orders for a price. No other kind would be employed under the circumstances. And Mrs. Meager would only break down and cry; under no conditions could she be of the slightest service, her terror of her stepson was the real cause of her nervous breakdown. The whole deplorable affair must be concealed from her if possible.

No, there was absolutely nothing to

rely upon but herself. And what could she do? The girl stood up in the darkness, her hands gripped, her eyes on the opening through the chaparral leading toward the house—the trail along which Bob Meager had disappeared. She must follow him; there was nowhere else for her to go. She must face this thing alone, with all the desperate courage she could muster. Tears would accomplish nothing, nor bitter anger. If the worst came she must act, swiftly, decisively—even to killing the monster.

There was no other choice left, no other possibility of escape. This awful necessity came to her almost as a relief. She felt justified, happy at making the final decision. Yes, she would do even that; she could do it rather than submit. It was the lesser evil of the two. But where could she procure a weapon? She possessed none of her own; had never dreamed of owning such a thing, yet they were plentiful enough about the ranch. Surely one could be easily secured, and, once in her possession, she knew how to handle it. Tom Meager had taught her that.

Impelled by this thought of self-defense, realizing clearly that she could turn nowhere else with any hope of escaping this defilement; that she could neither flee the place nor find assistance, Deborah, the color high in her cheeks, her lips firm pressed in determination, advanced resolutely through the darkness toward the house. She would defend herself at all hazards; before she would submit to that brute she would shoot to kill. She had become desperate enough to find peace, and courage, in the decision.

The men of the home ranch were evidently at supper, the big dining-hall being lighted, and, as she slipped past the unshaded windows, she had glimpse of the fellows within and heard their voices conversing loudly in Spanish. They were a motley bunch, scarcely a face down the long table that was not vicious and depraved—the scum of Mexico, the major-

ity exhibiting Indian blood, with not a familiar countenance among them. She lingered an instant in the shadows without, listening, but only shivered at the oaths which reached her ears. They were a precious gang of ruffians, indeed, worthy of their master, and the girl crept away, glad to escape their voices.

There was a single dim light burning in the bunkhouse, but no sign of any occupant. Undoubtedly every hand on the place was at supper, and no better opportunity could be found in which to seek for, and appropriate, some forgotten weapon. She advanced cautiously, listening intently for any sound, eager to accomplish her object. Once armed, she would feel more confident; the very touch of a weapon in her hand would bring her renewed courage.

THE BUNKHOUSE was a long building of adobe, the bunks lining the walls, open at both ends, the only light a lantern swung from a center beam. The glass of this was blackened with smoke, and only a dim radiance made the interior barely visible. However, there were no occupants; a glance through the open door convinced Deborah the place was temporarily deserted; yet that Mexican gang would soon be trooping out again from the dining-hall, and she would have but a few minutes in which to prosecute her search.

Without hesitation, but with heart beating wildly, she slipped silently within, her eager eyes swiftly searching the vacant bunks and the wooden pegs above, on which dangled a miscellaneous collection of garments. In one corner was a pile of saddles and other horse accoutrements; the whole place reeked with the smell of leather and was filthy in the extreme. The girl, nauseated by the foul odor, hesitated to penetrate farther, but a sudden outburst of laughter pealing through the open windows of the dining-hall, drove her desperately forward. Drawing her skirts close, she advanced

gingerly, satisfied that if any occupant had left his belt behind it would be found in one of the bunks.

She had gone entirely down one side, and moved across to the other before she found what she sought, her heart leaping exultantly as she perceived the gleam of a steel barrel in the dim light. It lay fully exposed on top of a dirty blanket, a wicked-looking "44" in a well-worn holster, with a belt containing a half-dozen cartridges. She grasped these in her hands, conscious, even as she did so, of the sound of voices outside. The men were already returning; scarcely a moment remained before some of them would enter the upper door. The moment was sufficient to permit the frightened girl to dash out of the lower entrance into the darkness beyond, and crouch there, the prize still securely in her hands, waiting opportunity to steal away toward the protection of the ranch-house. None of the fellows chose that entrance, but surged in through the other without a care in the world. The majority were using Spanish, very few words of which she could understand, but she gathered from what was said that the men anticipated a drunken revel later in the night and were quite delighted with the prospect.

The two who had entered first, however, stretched themselves out in bunks opposite each other, puffing vigorously on their cigarettes, and conversed in English, evidently proud of the accomplishment. One she recognized as Juan Sanchez, who had accompanied Bob Meager on his return, and had since been made foreman, a swarthy, evil-eyed half-breed, with a long mustache and a livid scar on one cheek. She had heard he left Mexico in fear of his life, and he treated the men under him as slaves, lashing them with his quirt, and ruling them by fear. The other was an Indian, a mere boy, but with cruel mouth, and face hideous from pock-marks. Sanchez called him Pedro, yet talked to him as he

might to a dog. It was the boy who questioned.

"Vat he say, señor, the man? I hear eet not all, the fools they make so mucha noise."

"We have *fiesta*!"

Sanchez blew a cloud of smoke into the polluted air, flipping the ash of his cigarettes onto the floor.

"Plenty drink, Pedro," he said indolently, "an' no work tomorrow. The boss he marry."

"Marry! The gringo? How that be again, señor?" And Pedro sat up, dangling his feet over the edge of the bunk.

Sanchez laughed grimly.

"Ah, Pedro, I forgot you were there. It was a great night, was it not; yet, Santa Anna! it counts for nothing this side the line. 'Tis no señorita of Mexico this time, but one of his own race, which is different; now he marry for long while."

"He marry of his own race—here?"

"Sure; you have seen her; she cares for the old señora."

"The girl in white?"

"'Tis she; and Mother of God, I would it was I who had her, Pedro! Did ever you see such eyes? *Sacre!* I would ride through hell to make her smile on me."

"Pah!" indifferently, "she is too pale for my taste."

"Pale! With those cheeks and lips! My blood boils at dream of her kisses. I'd give every maid in Mexico for such as her."

"'Tis as your taste runs, señor; but how came she to love this fiend of an *Americano*?"

"Love him!" Sanchez rocked with laughter. "Hell! He has but spoke to her the once, to my knowledge. I doubt if she knows yet the happiness in store for her. 'Tis what I like about him; he does not ask, he takes. *Sacre!* He got the other so; she hated him, yet it made no difference. 'Twill be so now; the girl may not love him, but she will marry him when he say the word. Why? Because she cannot help. It is an old game

Señor Bob plays; he is the devil's own, Pedro."

The Indian crossed himself piously.

"Dios, 'tis true," he admitted. "Have I not felt the smart of his whip? But he had the gold, señor, so what is it to us what he does with the girl?"

"You are right, Pedro," the other admitted grumblingly, "yet 'tis precious little of that gold we see or handle. Let's stop this chatter and win a bit of sleep before the bout begins."

Sanchez lay back upon the blankets, while the Indian stretched himself, his glance wandering over the bunch of Mexicans clustered at the other end of the hut. Evidently he saw nothing of interest there, for he also turned over and rested quietly, with face to the wall. Deborah, scarcely venturing to breathe, her heart fluttering with terror, but her hands clasping tightly the heavy revolver, stole silently away through the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

The Coming of the Judge

ASSURED that the way was clear, Deborah made a quick passage across the open space, a dim ghostly figure fleeing through the night, and succeeded in obtaining entrance at the side door without being observed. Meager was in one of the front rooms, for, as she paused breathless in the hall, she heard him swear at the cook in Spanish, and the sound of his hated voice hurried her movements. Anything was preferable to a chance meeting with him.

First of all she must safely conceal the weapon she had stolen, which was too large and cumbersome to be carried upon her person. Its disappearance from the bunkhouse was sure to be discovered, and, while she would be the last one suspected of such a prank, it nevertheless must be securely hidden away. Her own room at the end of the hall, small but neatly furnished, gave the greatest prom-

ise of security, and she felt a decided sense of relief when she finally thrust the weapon under various articles at the bottom of a bureau drawer. It was there, ready at hand, if an emergency arose, while she felt fully prepared to make use of it. The conversation just overheard had strengthened her resolve to defend herself at all hazards.

Certain that nothing further would occur until after the arrival of the expected guests from Nogales, she stole into the room occupied by her patient, relieved to find Mrs. Meager sleeping soundly. She had dreaded the necessity of explaining to the woman the situation, and very willingly permitted her to sleep, covering her quietly, and then stealing silently back to the solitude of her own room to think. Locking the door, she sat down wearily at the window, which was slightly open, peering anxiously out into the night, the cool evening air of the desert caressing her hot cheeks.

All appeared so calm and quiet without that it seemed impossible that a crisis was impending—that the lust, passion, brutality of man was only waiting the hour of outbreak. Her mind could scarcely comprehend the truth, or adjust itself to the reality of danger. With cheek resting on her arm, the girl's thoughts wandered, unable to center themselves wholly upon the problem she confronted. It seemed unreal, a dim, nebulous dream of imagination which must vanish with the dawn of another day.

Another day? What would it bring to her? Married to Bob Meager? Death? Or would she be a fugitive, with the stain of murder on her soul? She shuddered, the blood seeming to stop circulating in her veins, as these questions brought home so nakedly the situation. It must be one of the three; there was no alternative. If she had retained any glimmer of doubt before as to the man's purpose toward her, it had vanished utterly as she listened to the conversation of those two accomplices in the bunk-

house. They had discussed her as coolly as they would the disposal of a steer from the range. They evidently thought as little about it.

And Bob Meager had exhibited an equally brutal disregard. He had openly boasted of his purpose to those fellows, scattered money among them, no doubt, and promised them liquor in honor of the coming event. It was hideous. She was the butt of ridicule among that low gang; the object of laughter and coarse jokes; held as a mere chattel to be played with and then cast aside. God, it was enough to craze her! And, worst of all, the fellow was fully capable of this infamy. He was but repeating an old offense. Somewhere, down below those mountains that marked the boundary line, a girl of another race had met this same fate now confronting her, and was paying the price.

Well, she would never pay it, or if she must, then she would choose herself what that price should be. She felt at that moment that she could kill the brute as she would a mad dog. It was a duty, a privilege. He had no right to live, to prey on women, to insult and defame her own womanhood. And there was no other means of escape. Again and again her mind swept about the unbroken circle; the chain binding her was complete; she could turn nowhere for help; she was absolutely a prisoner. The revolver hidden away in that bureau drawer alone promised protection. There were tears in her eyes, but not tears of weakness or of pity; her lips were firmly set, and her hands clasping the window sill were steady with determination. She had made up her mind.

THE great stars overhead rendered the outside night dimly visible. She could see the bunkhouse, and the darker figures of men passing between her and the lantern glow within. Occasionally a loud voice reached her ears, or a peal of ribald laughter. At the hateful sound she clinched her teeth almost savagely,

believing they were making mock of her misery. The rising desert wind rustled through the trees and rattled the window above, and afar off toward the stables a dog barked incessantly. Except for these sounds all was still, desolate. About her was primitive solitude; she felt the isolation as never before, picturing before her mind those leagues of barren sand in every direction, lying silent and black, hemmed in with barriers of rock, deserted and dead under those dim stars. She was alone—alone! Beyond law, justice, mercy even, without a friend, a hope; a mere atom left to perish at the will of a brute. Even God had deserted her.

Her wrist watch had stopped, and she possessed no knowledge of the time, yet surely it must be late. The respite now would be short; those who were coming to carry out this mockery could not be delayed much longer. She even hoped now they would come; anything was better than this uncertainty, this horror of waiting. She began to long for the end, the call to face the inevitable. Far preferable now to act, rather than to continue to endure this awful strain of helpless anticipation. She was ready, desperate; she had counted the cost and chosen her course. If the call would come while she retained her courage!

She wondered where Bob Meager was, and what he was doing. There was no movement about the house, except that of the cook in the detached kitchen. A light burned there and she had glimpses of him occasionally, bustling about. The fellow's regular work would have been completed long ago; no doubt he was busily preparing some sort of feast with which to celebrate the wedding. The wedding! Her wedding! There was the harsh mockery of laughter in her voice as she repeated over aloud the ironic words. *Her wedding!* Girl-like she had wondered often what it would be like. And now it was here; she was actually waiting the hour, the moment. And the husband—the man whom Fate, or the

Devil, had brought to her? He was waiting, too, no doubt, alone in the front room yonder, drinking himself into a reckless courage, becoming a greater demon with every moment of delay. It was too much, too much. The very heart seemed to go out of her, and she buried her face in her arms on the sill, her body shaking with the sobs which could be no longer restrained.

SHE was lying there still, the starlight on her ruffled hair and one upturned cheek, but her mood had changed to that of wild, passionate despair. Tears no longer dimmed her eyes that were staring out blankly into the night. Suddenly her ears caught the distant sound of horses' hoofs through the silence, and she sat up, gasping for breath, once more clutched by fear. Yes, they were actually coming, the end was already at hand; he had not lied to her, not merely threatened—he was really brute enough to carry out the mad scheme. She was upon her feet, standing, motionless and rigid, back beyond view, when the little party rode up to the main door of the ranch-house, which opened at their approach, a startling beam of light flashing from within. She leaned forward, every nerve tense from excitement, to gain glimpse of the newcomers.

There were but three in the company, all men, and they had ridden far. She could tell this even in that dim reflection, for their clothing was whitened with the dust of the desert, and their horses advanced wearily with drooping heads. Yet she could discern little more. Two of the faces she could not distinguish at all, one a rather trim figure, sitting his saddle like a cavalryman; the other a humping, decidedly ungainly fellow, topped with a broad Mexican sombrero which completely shaded his features. These two remained mounted, but the third man swung instantly down from the saddle, noisily greeting Meager as he stepped into the open doorway. He was a heavily built American, with coarse,

bloated face, and wore a scraggly beard. When he spoke he croaked like a frog.

"Hullo, Bob!" he called out, waddling forward. "Well, I got here all right."

"So I see," with no special cordiality in the voice, which was hoarse from drink. "An' you didn't come alone, Garrity! Who the hell is with you?"

"Alone!" he sputtered out a laugh. "Did you think I'd ride across that damned desert at night alone? Not for all the money you got, Bob Meager. Arvan cum along with me, an' out here at Silver Springs we run into another old pard o' yours, an' persuaded him to ride on along with us. Ain't that all right?"

"It depends! Damn you, Garrity, I told you this was to be a private affair, didn't I? Who is the fellow?"

The judge chuckled, evidently amused at the drunken outburst.

"Got to be a modest violet, Bob?" he asked. "Say, when I git married the whole blame county is goin' to see it done. However, every guy to his taste, an' besides I ain't seen the woman yet. What was it you asked me?"

"Who was it you brought along from Silver Springs?"

"Frisco—don't that beat hell?"

"Frisco! Why, Frisco—I never supposed he dared show up this side the line."

He stepped out eagerly, reeling a little from the liquor he carried, yet heading straight toward the taller figure in the dim light. The latter swung down from the saddle and met him, Meager, garrulous with drink, greeting him effusively.

"Say, I'm glad to see you, kid," he burst forth, "but how the hell do you dare come here? There is a lot o' guys who'd kill their own mother for the reward Arizona's got on you. Tryin' to commit suicide?"

"No, not as desperate as that, Bob," answered the other, his voice rather low and musical. "I knew what I was doing all right, and these fellows didn't catch me asleep out at Silver Springs. I knew who they were before I joined up with

them. Fact is, Bob, I was headed this way and willin' to have company of the right sort."

"Headed this way? Huntin' me, you mean? What's up?"

"Nothing to worry about tonight. What I came for will wait. Safe for me here, isn't it?"

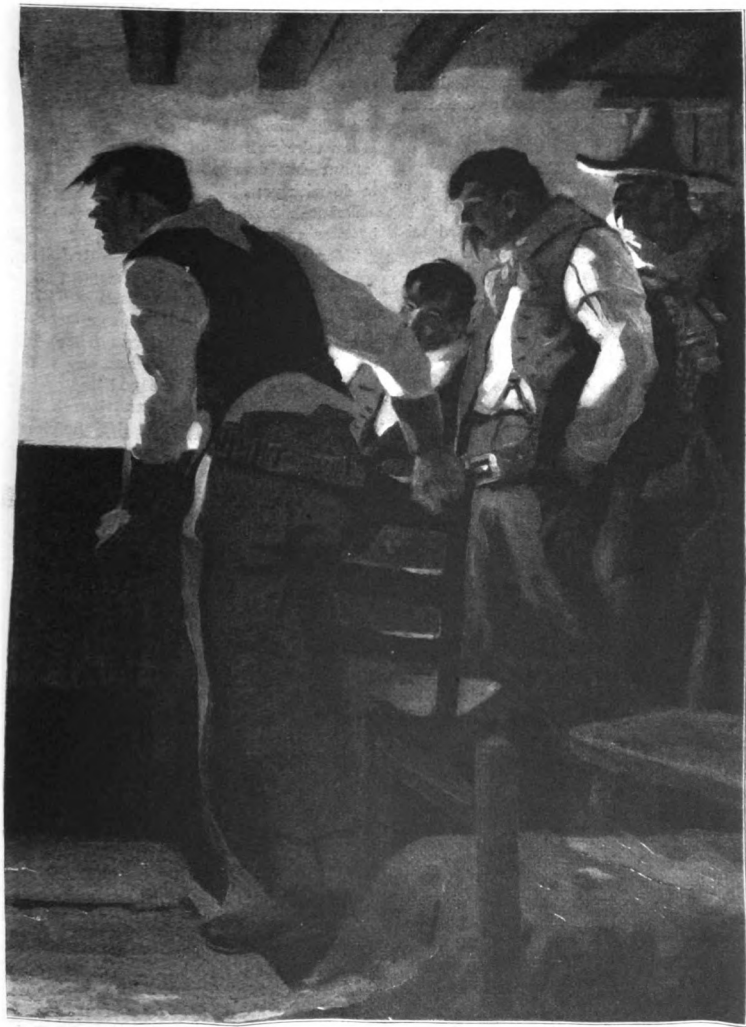
"Sure," and Meager burst into a drunken laugh. "I've cleaned out the old outfit complete. There ain't a damn Yankee here any more; all Mexicans I picked myself. Come on in, all of yer, an' let's have a drink. Hey there, Sanchez!" and his voice roared out the order to the bunkhouse. "Take care of these horses."

ONE BY ONE the dark shadows of the men disappeared within, Meager bringing up the rear and closing the door behind him. Deborah, her heart beating wildly, sank down upon a chair, with face buried in her hands. They had come, and there was no hope in them. The judge, the half-breed, were mere puppets, dancing to the voice of their master; the very tone in which he greeted them spoke his contempt of the fellows. Any appeal for mercy to such as they would be but wasted breath.

And the third man! The girl had somehow, at first view, hope of him. His trim appearance in the dim light, the pleasant, firm sound of his voice, her knowledge that he was not part of the original conspiracy, had given her a sudden thrill of expectation. But this existed no longer since she heard his name. The "Frisco Kid"; the very sound of it served to chill her blood. Outlaw, desperado, spoken of in whispers along the border; tales of him had reached her ears ever since her first arrival. The troop of cavalry that had made camp at the ranch had been on his trail, and the officer in command had repeated to her the fellow's wild exploits until they mingled with her dreams. The "Frisco Kid"! And he was here again, suddenly appearing out of the desert, a friend of Bob Meager's, either hiding from pur-



"'Oh, cut out the hot air, Garrity,' broke in Meager,



surging forward, unable to control himself any longer."

suit or planning some fresh deviltry. There was no hope for her in his presence.

Someone rapped gently on the door, and she sprang to her feet and stood motionless, staring through the darkness. They rapped again.

CHAPTER V

The Marriage

DEBORAH stepped forward silently, her lips pressed tight, opened the bureau drawer, straightening up once more with the heavy "44" gripped in her hand. The time had come, and she suddenly felt calm and cold.

"Who is there?"

"It's just me, Miss Meredith," answered a woman's voice weakly. "I've got one o' my spells again. I—I need yer bad. I just thought I couldn't drag myself this far; only I had to."

The reaction left the startled girl trembling, but she had no doubt as to the urgency of the call. Thrusting the revolver hastily back into its hiding place, unwilling that Mrs. Meager should even see it, she swiftly unlocked the door and stepped forth into the dimly lit hall. Her eyes caught one glimpse of her patient's face, ghastly white, but with terror rather than pain, and as quickly realized that she had walked into a set trap. Before she could even spring backward, a burly form crowded past her into the opening, completely blocking it, while directly fronting her, grinning maliciously, stood Juan Sanchez. She knew, without seeing, who was behind her—Bob Meager, chuckling in drunken satisfaction. It was the shrinking, frightened woman against the opposite wall who spoke first.

"I—I didn't want to do it," she screamed hysterically. "He—he made me; he—he said he'd kill me if I didn't. My God! What do these men want of you?"

"Shut up!" roared Meager angrily. "Run the old fool back into her room, Juan, and shut the door on her. Go on!

I'll take care of the girl. Rather fooled you that time, I reckon, young lady."

She looked him coldly, contemptuously in the face, conscious of the struggle to remove the older woman.

"Don't try to remain, Mrs. Meager," she said quietly. "Go back to your room. I can take care of myself."

"But—but dearie, what is it they want to do with you?"

Deborah laughed bitterly, so desperate by then as to be reckless.

"Marry me to this drunken brute," she explained, "this delightful stepson of yours. Pleasant prospect, isn't it? It may be accomplished with the gang he's got; but I'll make him pay. There is nothing you can do to help me, so go on back to your room—please go!"

Sanchez, grinning still, as though he enjoyed the task, forced the helpless woman down the hall. She yielded weakly, apparently so overcome by events as to be devoid of strength for resistance. The man shoved her roughly into the room, closed and locked the door.

DEBORAH heard her fall on the floor within, but her eyes were upon the threatening face of Bob Meager.

"Well?" she said sharply, "you seem to have won the first round?"

"You bet I have. There wasn't no need breaking in, while there was an easier way. So you ain't goin' to make no row?"

"I have not said what I mean to do."

"An' I don't give a damn," roughly. "Only I'd like to know whether you're going along by yourself, or whether we got to drag you? It's one or the other of them two things."

"Along where?"

"To the living-room, of course. That's where I aim to have the ceremony pulled off."

The girl thought quickly. Resistance there and then was absolutely useless. Both men were armed, and one of them, at least, was crazy drunk. Neither would

hesitate at any rudeness or insult; a struggle, a defiance, would mean both. They had gone too far by now to hesitate or fail to exercise their power. It would be better to appear to yield, to seem reconciled to the inevitable. She was weaponless, unable to put up any defense; perhaps in the larger room some better opportunity for action might present itself.

If she lulled their suspicions, led them to believe that she was conquered, she might be able to snatch a revolver from some holster, or even evade them and rush back to the safety of her own room. It was a grim, ghastly chance, but she could think of none better.

"I prefer going there by myself," she said, wondering at the steadiness of her voice, watchful of the expression on Meager's leering face. "No! don't touch me; don't dare touch me."

The fellow laughed, but there was a snarl in his tone.

"All right; so the cat has still got claws, has she? Well, I guess I can wait putting hands on you; it won't be for long. Go on ahead, then. Come along, Sanchez."

IN SPITE of her trembling limbs the girl walked firmly, never so much as turning her head to glance at the two behind her. She must act her part, play her character, permit them to think her indifferent to results, yet in no way afraid. Without a question she opened the door herself at the end of the narrow hall, and stepped into the room beyond.

It was all familiar to her, extending the full width of the home, low-ceilinged, the heavy beams supporting the upper floor blackened with smoke. A woven rug of rags partially covered the floor; the furniture was heavy, old-fashioned, many pieces rudely made. The narrow windows contained small panes of glass, the outer door was closed, and a clock ticked away on a cupboard in one corner. The only light came from a hand-lamp standing on a small table pushed back against the

wall. She saw all this with her first rapid glance.

There were two men in the room, the short, thick Mexican called Arvan, sprawling on a settee, and the judge, sunk into the easy chair, where old Tom Meager had sat for many years, calmly smoking a pipe. At their entrance the fellow got upon his feet and bowed, the pipe still in his hands. Deborah looked anxiously about for the other—the "Frisco Kid"—but he was not in the room. Then, ignoring the hand Garrity held out, her eyes fastened upon the face before her. She never had before seen a countenance more repulsive or so deeply marked by dissipation, and her heart seemed to choke her before the sudden stare of those pig eyes and the bestial grin of the thick lips.

"You — you are the justice from Nogales?" she asked doubtfully.

"That's what I am; Judge Cornelius Garrity, ma'am, at your service."

"And you were asked to come out here to marry me to Bob Meager?"

"Maybe so, if you are the gurl."

"I am Deborah Meredith."

"Begorry now, I had forgot the name entirely. But yer the one, no doubt. A fine husband ye'll be getting. Bob an' I hav' been friends many a year."

"I judge so; the natural tie between you is quite apparent. I want to appeal to you, Judge Garrity, as an officer of the law, to refuse to perform this marriage——"

"Refuse! I refuse Bob? Why, it's all straight enough; I've got the license here all made out regular with your names on it."

"That is just the point. That license was procured without my consent or knowledge. I repudiate it; I refuse to assent to it in any way. I have never agreed to marry Bob Meager. I am here now under threat, and I appeal to you for protection."

"My dear young woman," he began hoarsely, "I was told before coming here that you were somewhat temperamental,

and might therefore desire not to proceed with the ceremony. I shall not be swayed in any way by such tantrums. My own duty is plain; the papers are in correct form; Mr. Meager assures me that he had your consent, and has acted in accordance with your own wishes in the matter. It is too late at this hour to change your mind. I trust you will see the justice of this and make no further objections."

"Bob Meager told you that?"

"Certainly."

"He deliberately lied to you, then. I have never consented, and never will. I despise and abominate the man——"

"But my young lady, my young lady, stop a moment and listen to reason."

"Oh, cut out the hot air, Garrity," broke in Meager, surging forward, unable to control himself any longer. "Let her rave if she wants to; it don't hurt none of us, I reckon. You cum out here to do up this job fer me, an' the sooner it's over with the better. The law of Arizona don't say nuthin' 'bout whether the female consents or not, does it?"

"Well, not directly, Bob; it's implied, rather."

"Implied, hell! You go on and imply it then, pronto. I ain't organizin' no debatin' society, you damn potbellied idiot. I'm here to marry this Deborah Meredith. That's what I'm payin' you for; an' after that I'll attend to her tantrums myself."

"You mean to force me to marry you?" she asked, her own temper rising to combat his.

"Sure," he replied brutally. "I never supposed you'd do anything else but kick. But that's none of Garrity's business."

"But such a marriage will not be legal; no court would ever sustain it."

He laughed coarsely, his eyes staring insultingly into her own.

"Legal! Courts! You make me tired. This ain't Chicago! We're out here in an Arizona desert, an' I don't remember ever carin' a damn what the law says since I was a kid. Here's my law, when it comes to that," and he suggestingly slapped the gun holster on his hip, "an' there ain't no-

body tells me what I shall do or what I shan't. You better get that first of all. Legal! Well, I reckon you heard what it was the Judge said, didn't yer? He's got the license there, an' the authority. Here's two witnesses, accordin' to law. Now what the hell you goin' to do? Suppose any court is goin' to take your word, unsupported, against the four of us? Besides," and he grinned suggestively, with a drunken leer, "after tonight, I don't reckon you'll be huntin' the court anyway; you'll be damn glad you've got a husband. Come on up closer, boys, so you can see the whole show—Garrity is goin' to splice us now, without no more words about it."

THE judge cleared his throat, taking a printed slip of paper from his pocket in his stubby fingers. However he may have regretted this job, his personal fear of Meager overcame all objections to performing it.

"Bob's quite right, Miss," he said, with an effort at dignity. "He's sure got the law with him, an' the witnesses."

"But I refuse to marry him; I do not consent," she insisted with trembling voice. "I have never told him I would."

"I ain't got nothin' to do with your personal quarrels. Them is fer you an' Bob to settle. I reckon every married couple has 'em. You just stand there an' face me."

She was pressed back against the table, helpless to move, too thoroughly bewildered and dazed for the moment to attempt any action. Sanchez had deserted the door he was guarding, and stood just behind her grinning cheerfully. Arvan was opposite, his dark half-breed Indian face exhibiting no emotion, while Meager had planted himself at her right, his bloodshot eyes scowling into her own. She saw no chance to push away, no hope of protest; she could but struggle for breath, with limbs trembling beneath her.

Garrity began to read, but she only heard him dumbly, her mind inactive, comprehending not a single word. Once

Meager reached out and grasped her hand, but she jerked it free, with no other sense than her hatred of his touch. The judge's voice droned on, what he said having no meaning. Then, suddenly, consciousness came back as though something had snapped in the numbed brain, the words sounding clear, distinct, in the utterance:

"I pronounce you husband and wife, and whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

With a single sharp cry, she sprang wildly backward, jerked herself free from Sanchez' hasty grip, and dashed headlong for the door leading into the hall. She had no plan, no thought-out scheme of escape, only instinctively headed for the one unlocked passage leading from the room.

The quick and unexpected movement gave her time. The startled Mexican and Meager, springing forward to intercept her flight, collided, cursing and striking at each other in that instant of confusion, while she flung open the door and swept out, untouched, into the hall. Her mind contained but one thought as she ran—her own room, the weapon in the bureau drawer.

She knew she could defend herself there; kill herself, kill him, if necessary! He should never touch her—never! She was free now, and would be helpless in his hands never again. She would die first, die gladly, but Bob Meager would never possess her alive.

The drunken oaths behind spurred her on, strengthened her resolve. She ran, never glancing back, straight to the entrance sought, flung it open and sprang within, slamming the door shut behind her and feeling desperately for the key. It was not in the lock, nor could she find it lying on the dark floor beneath. Drunk as Meager was, he had thought of that; had seen to it that the way to her apartment would be left unguarded. The girl turned, her heart beating rapidly, and crossed to the bureau. Thank God; he had not discovered the gun, and she

swung defiantly about, the weapon gripped in her hand.

CHAPTER VI

The Blow in the Dark

DEBORAH, the revolver held tightly in her fingers, moved silently back into the darkest corner of the room, and crouched there listening. She had no time to think or plan, no comprehension of anything other than a desperate determination to defend herself to the last extremity. If those men entered that door she meant to shoot, and shoot to kill. This one deadly purpose was all she was conscious of, or cared for.

Perhaps in some vague way, Meager may have realized her desperation. He knew nothing of her being armed, yet, even in his drunkenness, had learned something of her temper, and hesitated to face her immediately. Why should he run the risk? He already had attained his principal object; they were married, and he could wait until her anger subsided somewhat before asserting his legal rights. Meanwhile the boys were waiting for their drinks, and he felt more inclined to celebrate the victory along with them and let tomorrow take care of itself.

Some faint conception of this situation occurred to her, as she crouched there in the dark watchfully waiting, yet remained undisturbed. The tension relaxed, and she felt again her womanly weakness, her questioning, and despair. She laid the revolver beside her on the floor and buckled the belt with its load of cartridges about her waist; then picked the weapon up once again and rested it on her knee. She was no longer crazed, but able to think clearly and decide what to attempt next.

The starlight filtering through the window gave her a dim vision of the interior. No one touched the door, but she could hear voices in the hall and knew some of the men had followed that far. What had halted them she could only guess at,

for merely detached words reached her ears, mingled with oaths, and finally ending in loud laughter. Then they seemed to go away, for all became silent, and in the reaction the knowledge that she had been thus left alone, undisturbed, brought to the girl a strange sense of shame. Her cheeks were no longer white, but hot and glowing.

Meager's action could mean but one thing—his utter confidence that she was already securely in his power. She could not escape, she would be waiting there for him when he was ready to possess her. Now he would go back, drink and carouse with his boon companions; what difference did an hour make; she was his wife; when he was drunk enough, reckless enough, he would come to claim her. That was what he had boasted, no doubt, and his coarse joke had caused that outburst of laughter. The foul, brutal cur! Well, let him come; she would continue to wait, and he should have his welcome. His wife! She might be his widow before dawn.

SHE did not move for a long, long time; did not take her eyes from the closed door, or release her grip on the revolver. She felt cold, tireless, actuated only by a relentless hatred. She wished he would come so that it might be over with. But nothing happened, and, little by little, her mood changed. The strain began to tell, began to break down her resolution, left her doubtful and afraid. She ventured to open the door a slight crack and peep cautiously out into the hall; it was deserted, not even a guard had been stationed there, but the door at the farther end, leading into the living-room, had been left open, and she could hear the men in there making merry. It was a babel of voices at first; then someone began to sing a ribald song in English, and at the first line she drew back, shutting out the hateful sound with a feeling of supreme disgust.

Trembling from head to foot, she

crossed to the window and looked out into the cool mists of the night. No guard had been posted here either. Evidently she had been left perfectly free to go or come as she pleased, yet she fully understood how limited that freedom was. She might flee from the house, but that was all; the borders of the ranch were still her prison walls, the efficient guard those sand deserts stretching in every direction, trackless and impassable on foot, vast, waterless leagues, where she would perish miserably. A light still burned in the bunkhouse, but the building seemed deserted. Once two men passed down the hill, leaning heavily upon each other, staggering and singing, disappearing finally through the open door.

She was still staring after them, when a sound from behind suddenly caused her to face about. A fumbling hand was lifting the iron latch; the door was being pressed open with an effort at silence. Motionless, breathless with apprehension, the girl watched the entering beam of light broaden until Bob Meager stood swaying in the doorway, clutching at the knob to steady himself. He did not see her at first, his bloodshot eyes blindly searching the apartment; then he must have perceived her outline against the window, for he lurched forward, giving vent to an exclamation of relief.

"Hell, so you are here, waitin' fer me? Damned if I didn't think maybe ye'd taken a chance outside. Too blame sensible, ain't you? I thought likely ye'd come to yer senses if I left yer here alone awhile. Goin' ter be good to me now, you little cat? Say, what you got ter say fer yerself, anyhow?"

"Only this; don't you come another step toward me."

He burst into a gruff laugh, slapping his knee.

"The hell you say! Who do you think I am, anyhow? Some kid afraid of a woman? Say, listen, that's no way fer a wife to welcome her husband. I got a right in here, an' you bet I'm goin' to

stay. Got an idea you can bluff me, I reckon. Well, I ain't that kind, an' you might as well learn it now as later. This yere is our weddin' night an' we've had a hell of a time celebratin' it. The boys is all drunk, plum laid out; I'm the only sober guy left in the party, an' so I come in yere to see you. Here's where I ought to be, ain't it? Say, why don't you say something? What you goin' to do?"

"I am going to kill you, Bob Meager," she said coldly, "unless you leave this room."

"Kill me! Why, you blame little fool, I could crush the life out o' you with one hand—see, just like that. An' I tell you, I got the right if you get too gay. I'm yer husband, ain't I? That's what the law says, and I'm goin' ter be your husband, you can bet yer life on that. Think you'll scare me, do you?" he burst into an ugly laugh. "Not this time, you won't."

He turned and closed the door; then crossed the room toward her, reeling drunkenly, yet quite able to retain his feet. The starlight rendered his features visible. Her motionless silence caused him to pause.

"Pretty damn still, ain't you?" he exclaimed, peering at her suspiciously. "Why don't you talk? When I speak to a woman I want her to say something."

"There is nothing more for me to say."

"Only that yer goin' ter kill me if I touch you, hey? All right, then; here's yer chance."

He took two steps toward her, his hands reaching out eagerly, his face thrust forward. Then he stopped suddenly, with startled eyes staring into the leveled muzzle of the "44," his lips giving suppressed utterance to a swift ejaculation.

"I'll be damned!"

"Put up your hands, Bob Meager!" The words were icy cold. "Up, I say! Don't fool with me now. Turn around and go out that door. I am not playing; this means your life or mine. Go!"

"But say, wait—listen to me."

"Not to another word. This is my

game. You thought you were coming here to bully a helpless girl. You were so sure of your brute strength you even took off your gun and left it behind. You are not sneering about my killing you now. God knows why I don't, you drunken cur; but there is only one thing that will save you—get out that door, and stay out."

He cringed back, cowardly, yet with drunken cunning. Desperate as she was, there was hesitation in the girl's action. Dimly he grasped the truth that she shrank from the necessity of shooting; that she would actually pull the trigger only as a last resort. He took the chance.

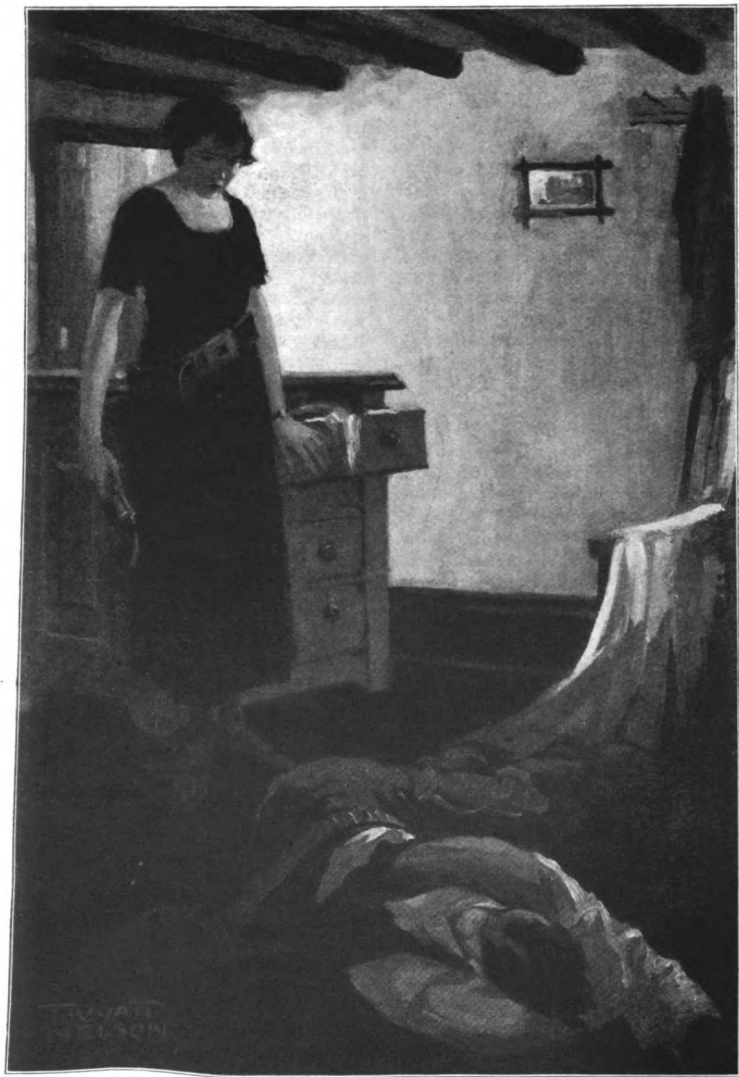
"Sure," he muttered, "you got the drop and I caved. So long, honey."

He half turned away, reeling drunkenly, then suddenly, unexpectedly, flung his body directly at her, crushing her back against the wall, both falling together, the weapon undischarged beneath her body. Swift, surprising as the assault was, she had yet escaped the grip of his hands, and was on her knees again before he could move.

The revolver was her only weapon, but in the fall she had lost grip of the stock. It lay there glittering in the starlight, and desperate, maddened by the danger, obeying the first wild instinct of the instant, she snatched it up by the barrel and struck with all her force at the man's head. The fellow gave utterance to no moan, his limbs twitched, and then he lay motionless, his face against the floor.

Deborah slowly lifted her body, shrinking back from the darkly outlined form, beginning to comprehend with horror what she had done. She still held tight to the weapon with which she had dealt the blow, although realizing that she no longer required its protection.

The silence was terrifying; her nerves tingled painfully, she found difficulty in breathing. Was the man dead? Had she actually killed him with that one hasty blow? She could scarcely realize the possibility, and yet she had struck with all her force, driven to it by terror



"Her courage had not failed her, and he was lying there now in the darkness at her feet, sorely wounded, perhaps dead."

uncontrollable. She shrank now from even touching him; nurse as she was, having witnessed death in every form of horror, and ministered to wounds of every degree, she would not place hand on this man, whether he lived or died. Her repugnance to him had become an obsession; she felt no desire to save him if she might. He represented to her mind all that was base and evil; she was glad she had struck him down.

But what now? This question overshadowed all else. The thing she had been imagining for so long had at last come to pass. He had come to her, come claiming her with insult and outrage, and she had actually dealt the blow of which she had dreamed. Her courage had not failed her, and he was lying there now in the darkness at her feet, sorely wounded, perhaps dead.

It was her act, she had done it—what now? She had never faced this situation before, the aftermath. She had only planned out her course of action up to this point, giving no heed to what must naturally follow. Now it fronted her in sudden, grim, gripping terror. Whether Meager was dead or alive, she must get away. Better to face any danger of the great desert than remain where she was, with not a friend to counsel or protect her, not a white man to whom she could appeal. And, if she did go, her escape must be accomplished at once; every instant of delay only increased the peril. There must be hours of darkness yet; those who would stop her, who would follow on her trail, were in drunken stupor, either in the living-room, or the bunkhouse. At present, at least, the way must be clear.

THE girl thrust the revolver back into its holster at her waist, and glanced out through the window into the quiet night. The decision to act had left its impress upon her; she was no longer trembling with fear, doubtful as to her best course. Of two evils, the desert, or these lawless men, she chose the less

cruel, the desert. If she was to die, it would be, at least, in honor. Once decided, her mind worked rapidly. In all probability not a man remained sober about the home ranch; if any horses had been left in the stable, she, therefore, ought to get several hours the start of a pursuing party. She believed Meager was dead, and, if so, his followers would be slow to discover what had happened, and would possess no leadership. This, inevitably, would mean delay; while, even if the fellow should live, hours surely must elapse before he could take the trail.

And then, with a good horse under her, she would be beyond sight out on the desert, riding straight for those two peaks that old Tom Meager had pointed out to her as marking the Nogales trail. With such a start in the race there was surely a chance to win. Her pulses throbbed exultantly at this sudden awakening of hope, and, without so much as another glance at the body prostrate on the floor, she hurried to carry out her plans.

CHAPTER VII

The Man in the Dark

AN UNRECOGNIZED Mexican lay in drunken slumber, curled up like a dog, on the floor of the passage, but she found no difficulty in passing the fellow. She neither heard nor saw any of the others, as she made her way through the rear door, and across the few feet of open space dividing the main house from the detached kitchen. There was a lamp burning in the latter, and the remains of fire in the stove, but no occupant. Undoubtedly the cook had indulged also, and was now slumbering with the rest in some dark corner. Deborah knew the place well, and lost no time in gathering together what food she required, fortunate enough to discover a small sack in which it could be conveniently transported.

The effort had proven easy and safe so far, and her heart beat hopefully, as she emerged from the kitchen, thus equipped. Now if she could only procure a horse, escape actually appeared possible. In the dim radiance of the stars, she could trace the dark outlines of the stables down the steep grade, a hundred yards, or more, beyond the bunkhouse. Doubtless the ranch horses had all been turned loose into the large corral. She had no means of catching these half-broken animals, but it might be that the horses ridden by the party arriving during the evening had been put in the stable, ready for immediate use. These were weary enough from their desert trip when they arrived, but that was hours ago; they must have been fed and watered since, and, with the rest, would be fairly fit by this time for another journey. They were wiry bronses, able to endure any amount of hardship.

It was then she remembered the horse the "Frisco Kid" had been riding. Even in the darkness she had marked the fine, blooded lines of the animal, the far better condition in which he appeared to be. The animal had lifted his head when the light from the open door streamed forth, and pawed impatiently, with his front hoofs. If she could only lay hands on him.

"Frisco Kid!" What had ever become of the fellow? She wondered as she slowly made her way down the slope, keeping as far from the bunkhouse as possible. She had neither seen nor heard of him since that first meeting with Meager. He had simply dropped out of sight, disappeared completely. Perhaps he was among those drunken dogs in the living room, sleeping off their carousal; yet somehow she did not believe it. Someway his voice and manner had strangely impressed her as different; he did not belong with that crew. Outlaw, desperado, she knew him to be, a man with a price on his head, yet surely he was no drunken, roystering brute. He had not even gone into the house; she was

sure of that now, remembering clearly. He had led the horses away, while the other two entered with Meager. Nor had he returned later; not at least while she was at the window, and he was not in attendance at the wedding.

THEN the truth suddenly occurred to her—the man was hiding out. He dare not risk drinking, or being shut up in a house. He was a hunted creature, watchful of treachery in every human being. He could trust no one, not even his companions in crime; there was a reward for him, dead or alive. He would be out yonder in the dark somewhere, alone, he and his horse, wakening at the slightest sound. Perhaps he would be the one she needed to fear the most, when the pursuit started. These thoughts flashed swiftly through her mind, almost unconsciously, as she stole forward through the shadows. She passed a figure lying in the trail, too drunk even to reach the bunkhouse, but as she crept past the open door of the latter, she saw no signs of any occupants within. They were there, no doubt, a good dozen of them, but lying helplessly in their bunks with no present interest in what might be happening about them. Except for the few line-riders, and that outlaw hiding in some thicket of chaparral, the whole personnel of the ranch were stupefied with liquor, indifferent to any occurrence going on about them.

A bit reckless now, because of this knowledge, the girl ventured through the great open door of the stable, and began groping her way forward, searching the stalls. It was intensely dark inside, but the place was familiar enough. There were ten stalls, but seldom did these contain anything other than work horses; the riding ponies were almost invariably turned loose in the corral. She could only hope there might be an exception to this general rule on this particular night—at least that the Nogales animals might have been stabled, rather than turned out to run free. She stole for-

ward cautiously, hearing no sound to alarm her, the bag of food grasped in one hand, the other extended in an endeavor to touch familiar objects so as to guide her through the gloom.

THE first stall was empty, and, as she started to advance toward the second, she came to a sudden pause, with heart leaping into her throat—there had been a sound at her left, a rustling of straw, as though something had made a quick movement. She listened breathlessly, drawing a breath of relief at the succeeding silence. No doubt it was a horse stirring, or possibly a rat. Then a voice spoke sternly not three feet away.

"Put up your hands! Who are you? What are you doing in here?"

She obeyed instinctively, too frightened to even speak, dropping the bag to the floor, forgetting completely the revolver buckled about her waist.

A hand reached forward out of the darkness, and gripped her upraised arm; she was conscious of the close presence of a man, yet for the instant retained no power of movement.

"Why don't you speak?" said the same voice, impatiently, evidently angered at her silence. "What are you sneaking about in here for? Well, I'll be damned," his tone changing, "if I don't believe it's a woman."

"It is a woman," she managed to reply falteringly.

"But," she added, "but does that make any difference?"

He laughed, a certain relief evident in the sound, although he did not in any way relax his vigilance.

"Well, I confess it might," he admitted, "for you are a most unusual discovery in this section. I was looking for almost anything else. You belong with this outfit?"

"To the Meager ranch, you mean? Yes—that is, I have been employed here. You—you are not a Mexican, are you?"

"I should say not. I belong north of the line, if that's any relief to you. And

what's more, if you want to be square with me, I'll play fair on my side. You believe that?"

"I shall have to; it wouldn't do me any good to lie."

"I reckon not; so let's get it over with; who are you?"

"Deborah Meredith," she explained, rather eagerly. "I—I am a professional nurse; my home is in Chicago. Tom Meager employed me to come out here and take care of his wife."

"Tom Meager; was that the name of Bob's father?"

"Yes. He was straight. I liked him; she was his second wife, not Bob's mother."

"Sure, I heard a little about that; Bob told me; he hated the woman."

"Are you a friend of Bob Meager's?"

The man chuckled and she knew he had put away the weapon he had held in his hand.

"Well, he's got an idea I am. We've run about together a bit, I admit; which confession maybe is no recommendation to you."

"No, it is not."

"I thought likely it wouldn't be. So you and Bob are good friends?"

"I despise and hate the man; he is a drunken brute."

"But if you feel that way, why did you remain here on the ranch?"

"Because I have had no chance to get away since his father died. I could not desert my patient, and besides, had no reason to suppose Bob would come back and take possession. He was a fugitive from justice; his father had lost all faith in him, and—and I had reason to believe he had been shut out from all right to this property."

"You had reason to believe? What reason? I am not asking merely from curiosity; I want to understand the entire situation."

"Believe me, I would rather befriend you than him."

"Why do you say that? Just to draw me on?"

"No; I am really interested. I already have an idea what this means; you are endeavoring to escape alone?"

"It seemed my only chance," she confessed, heartened by the man's words, and manner, and eagerly wishing she might see his face.

"But I am talking with a stranger; perhaps I trust you too much."

"Is there anything else you can do?" he insisted. "I have it in my power to aid you, or prevent your escape. You must choose which it shall be."

She drew in her breath sharply, the full truth of what he said clear to her mind.

"What you say is true," she admitted frankly.

"I must, of course, trust you blindly; I have no other choice. You are not employed here?"

"No, I just blew in last night."

"What is your name?"

"Daniel Kelleen."

"You are not a cow-puncher surely? You—you have education."

He laughed good-humoredly.

"Nevertheless, I am quite accustomed to cow-punching. Perhaps I've had a trifle more schooling than some of the boys."

"Still, if you accept me at all, it will have to be just as I am. Now let me have the straight of all this affair, and then we'll get busy. Tell it to me from the first."

DEBORAH stared at the man's dim outline through the darkness. If she could only see the expression of his face.

And yet, as she had already acknowledged, there was no choice left her—she must trust him blindly, absolutely; he could defend, or betray her at his own will.

So clear was this situation she scarcely hesitated.

"Yes, I will tell you, Daniel Kelleen," she said gravely. "I must trust someone, and you seem to be the one sent. All

I know of you is, that you are an American.

"And I am an American also, and a woman. If that does not appeal to you, then nothing else will. I have told you already who I am, and how I came here. The remainder of the story is brief. I have had nothing to do with Bob Meager since he returned, immediately after his father's sudden death. There was no opportunity for me to leave the ranch, so I remained here in care of Mrs. Meager.

"Until last evening I never encountered Bob but once. Then he came unexpectedly into his stepmother's room, and we met briefly. I thought nothing of this meeting at the time, except that his actions and words intensified my dislike of the man. He was brutal and insulting to us both. After that I kept out of his way, and he apparently ignored my presence entirely. I did notice, however, that he was getting rid of all the old employees on the ranch, and replacing them with Mexicans.

"Evidently he wanted no Americans about him."

"I understand; not his kind."

"So I thought, but with no conception that this change had any reference to me."

"It did have, then?"

"So it seems now. He came upon me suddenly alone last evening. I was at the edge of the plateau, close to the Nogales trail, watching the sunset over the desert, and saw nothing of him until he stood beside me.

"There was no chance for me to get away—no chance whatever—and I had to listen to what he said."

Deborah shuddered and dropped her face into her hands, but instantly lifted it again, as she talked her voice strengthening with indignation.

Kelleen made no movement, and the girl went on:

"He—he was not even decent about what he had to say. I was merely a chattel he had to deal with, a slave to use as

he pleased. It doesn't sound true, but it is true, every word."

"Go on, go on!" said the other dispassionately.

"I know Bob Meager."

"He said he was going to marry me; he didn't ask me about it at all; just stated it as a fact. Said he'd made up his mind the first time he saw me, and had been getting things in readiness ever since."

"When I tried to object, the brute just laughed, and asked how I was going to help myself. He made me realize the situation I was in, without an American left on the ranch, and those miles of desert stretching away on every side. He—he frightened me terribly, and he gave me no time to think, or plan an escape. To appeal to him was utterly and hopelessly useless."

"I should say it would be."

"Then he told me everything was arranged for this very night. A—a man was coming out from Nogales to marry us."

"He said I better go into the house, and get ready. Then he laughed again, and went away. He—he wasn't afraid to leave me there alone, for there was no place where I could hide, no chance to leave the ranch. I—I was hardly sane, but—but after awhile I went back to the house."

"What else was there I could do?"

"Nothing, I reckon, unless you killed the cuss."

"What did you do?"

"I—I made up my mind to do even that," she confessed. "I stole a revolver from the bunkhouse while the men were at mess, and then locked myself in my

own room to wait. I thought perhaps he was lying, but he wasn't. Along about nine o'clock the outfit rode in from Nogales.

"There was nothing whatever for me to do but wait desperately. I meant to stay there, and defend myself, behind that locked door."

"But even in that the devil tricked me. He got Mrs. Meager to call to me from the hall, saying she had one of her bad turns, and I opened the door to help her. I—I hardly know what happened after that."

"I tried to explain to the man who came to marry us, but he wouldn't listen. He was just a creature that Bob Meager had picked up somewhere to serve him in his evil plans."

"Sure! I know him—Garrity; he'd murder his mother—anyone—for a drink of booze."

"But is he really a judge?"

"He's a justice of the peace down at Nogales."

"Then I was really married? It—it was legal?"

"Darn if I know about that. I think likely the whole outfit would swear you consented."

"Who were in the gang?"

"Juan Sanchez, a ranch foreman, and a black-faced fellow who came out from Nogales."

"Arvan; they'd swear anything Bob told them to."

"They'd make it out you were married all right."

"But—but I'm not; not now!"

"Not now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I've—I've killed him!"

(The second installment of "The Gift of the Desert" will appear in the March number of Wayside Tales.)

THE INFATUATING OF ANN

By Ellis Parker Butler

Illustrations by Dorothy Phelps Christy



KILO is a quiet little Iowa town of six hundred souls in the rolling prairie corn country. It is built around a public square that has a paint-peeled band stand. The Farmers' Savings Bank, The Citizens' Savings Bank, Warker & Schultoss's Block and one or two other buildings are of brick. The balance of Kilo is frame, in various painted and unpainted conditions.

The third house on the right-hand side as you come up the long board walk from the railroad depot, as it is always called in Kilo, is Uncle Billy Briggs' house. The lot is fifty feet wide, giving room for a respectable vegetable garden alongside the house and is deep enough for a chicken yard, woodshed and the other outhouses usually made and provided. Back of the house is a pyramidal mound ten feet on each side and four feet high, sodded on all sides, and with an iron pump on top. This is a cyclone cellar. The pump is to evacuate the water that often gathers in the cyclone cellar, which

is far from waterproof—though I don't know why.

Before Uncle Billy's house stands a reasonably efficient picket fence. The gate, however, is off its hinges and neatly stored away in the woodshed. Neither are there any side fences. The picket fence stands unsupported, except by its posts; it does not hook onto anything at either end. It seems to exist largely as an embodied aspiration for paint that does not materialize.

On the small front porch one might have seen, almost any nice day before Sister-in-law Ann arrived, Uncle Billy himself, with his pipe in his mouth, tilted back in a chair, spitting. For a man who had practised spitting for many, many years, Uncle Billy was a poor exponent of the art.

The porch was narrow, the openings between the virgin bower vines were large, but only five times out of ten did Uncle Billy perform perfectly. Four times out of every ten he missed the

openings and hit the vines; the tenth time he missed the openings, missed the vines, missed the porch, and rather shamefully brushed the dewy drops from the front of his shirt with the flat of his hand. He was not a copious expectorator and he did not chew plug or fine cut, so no great harm was ever done, but he hated it. It did seem so dumbed inefficient. Especially if he had to wipe his chin.

Aside from this one time in ten Uncle Billy was quite happy and contented—until Sister-in-law Ann arrived. In the forty and odd years during which Sally had been his wife, Billy had become more or less "usened" to Sally, and Sally had become quite considerably resigned to Uncle Billy and his ways and manners. She *would* scold him like a good one, but he never took that to heart; wives were that way. They had to do something to keep alive, poor things.

Then Sister-in-law Ann came with a trunk, which Helderbury, the Kilo carter, dropped off at Uncle Billy's when he was on the way up from the freight depot with a load of crated tinware for Warker & Schultoss.

"Much obliged, Joe," Uncle Billy said from his seat on the porch. "I don't suppose I owe you noth' for fetchin' up Sister Ann's trunk?"

"Well, no, Billy," Joe said, grinning. "Not seein' as it was Sister Ann's. Was goin' by anyhow!"

The front screen door of the house swung open with a sweep that sent it banging against the wall. Sister-in-law Ann, almost the living image of Sally, but twice as masterful, was at the place in the fence where the gate should have been in three strides.

"Looky here!" she cried. "What you mean dumpin' my trunk down that way? I seen you, tryin' to baggage-smash it all to flinders! Nice piece of business! You shoulder up that trunk and take it up to my room, and mighty quick about it. The idea!"

"Well, you see, mam," said Joe, easing

his bulk down from his wagon seat, "I'm willin' enough to fetch it up for you, but I just fetched it up from the depot as a sort of favor—I mean it wasn't meant for a job-like—I mean—"

"A lot I care what you mean!" snapped Ann. "You grasp hold of that trunk—"

"Yes, mam," Joe said quickly, and he did it.

ANN accompanied him. She made him carry the trunk upstairs and be mighty careful not to forget to wipe his feet, and be mighty careful not to mar the wallpaper, and be mighty careful to set the trunk down careful. She also made him undo the straps and unlock the trunk. Then she opened the lid part way and saw that the trunk was too close to the wall and she told Joe what she thought of him, and him a man that pretended to know about handling trunks, and nobody knows how long he had been handling trunks, and look at it! So Joe moved the trunk a quarter of an inch from the wall and Sister Ann opened her purse and gave him a dime—a Canadian dime with a piece slit off one edge.

Joe wiped his forehead.

"Yes'm," he said. "My charge is most usually twenty-five cents."

"Twenty-five cents nothing!" said Sister Ann. "Go about your business and look out you don't touch them dirty hands of yours to nothin' on the way out."

Joe paused on the porch for a moment or two.

"Billy," he said, "your sister-in-law is some snappy little person, ain't she? I wish I had her for my wife."

Sarah heard that. She heard it and pricked up her ears, all her match-making instincts jumping. But she did not see Joe Helderbury lean down close to Uncle Billy's ear or hear him say, with feeling in his voice:

"I'd break her back for her if she was my wife; that's what I'd do for her, the wildcat!"



"It did seem so dumb and inefficient. Especially if he had to wipe his chin."

JOE HELDERBURY lived next door, in the fourth house as you come up from the railroad depot, and he lived with his mother, having thus far managed to remain a bachelor. Sitting on his wagon, or on the curb before Warker & Schultoss's store, or on a comfortable chair in the store, waiting for a job of hauling, had made Joe broad of beam, and time and his mother's good cooking had filled him up in due proportion to his width.

He was a fat, good-natured, prosperous truckman and entirely happy, but his mother mourned audibly that he had reached his fifty-second year without having annexed a wife. She wondered what would become of Joe when she died and he had to eat just any old kind of food.

Joe's mother was a little old lady, bent almost double, with hands that she was continually rolling around each other, and eyes that were agedly blue and apt to fill with tears.

"And he says to Billy," Mrs. Briggs told Mrs. Helderbury, as they met in their side yards where the fence should have been, "he says to him in my actual hearin', Mrs. Helderbury, 'I wish I had your sister-in-law Ann for my wife.' He did so; he said them very actual self-same words."

"Do tell!" Mrs. Helderbury said, rolling her hands. "If it only could come to pass!"

"And no reason why it shouldn't come to pass," said Sally Briggs almost indignantly. "That's how he feels about it, and I dare say Ann would be glad enough to git any kind of a—I dare say Ann can see he's a fine young feller."

"She ain't much older than he is, is she?" asked Mrs. Helderbury. "Not to speak of?"

"Older? Land sakes! She's plenty younger, if that's what you mean. She's full ten years younger than what I be. Ann ain't fifty yet, and she's as spry as a chicken, every bit."

"She sounds spry," admitted Mrs. Helderbury.

"She's got snap, just like your Joe

says," said Sally admiringly. "Well, all I got to say is I hope something comes of it. Not but what we've got to help it along some, Mrs. Helderbury. Joe's shy. That can't be denied. I don't say he ain't infatuated, but I do say he's shy. We got to help. We got to throw them together all we can. Now—now how'd you and Joe like to come over to chicken dinner tomorrow evening?"

"We'd admire to, I'm sure," said Mrs. Helderbury, "but Joe mostly has dinner in the middle of the day."

"Well, call it a chicken supper then," said Mrs. Briggs. "We got to give them more chance to be together than a noon dinner would allow for, seein' how Joe has to meet the 1:28 train with the bus. What kind of pie does Joe like best?"

"He likes all kinds but pieplant pie," his mother said. "He don't ever eat more than two pieces when I have pieplant pie."

"I'll have blackberry and apple, then."

"Yes'm," said Mrs. Helderbury. "He adores blackberry. He says it goes right to his stomach."

WHEN his mother informed the fifty-two year old infatuated young man that he was to sup with the Briggs family the next evening he gave evidence that he was indeed shy. He concealed his joy in a masterly manner. He sat down so suddenly that his chair threatened to cave in under him.

"Gosh all hemlock, mother!" he cried, "my goodness sakes alive! What in the eternal did you ever want to go and say we would eat with them folks for? Well, by dad! That's the last thing in this world I ever would want to do! What in the eternal did they want to ask me for?"

"They like you, Joseph. Mis' Briggs is goin' to have chicken and blackberry pie."

"Well," said Joe reluctantly, "mebby I can live through it once, but don't you go and do it again. If you do I won't go, that's all."

"You always was so shy," his mother crooned.

"Shy, shucks!" said Joe.

Uncle Billy was hardly less perturbed by the news that he was going to give an evening dinner.

"Dod rat it!" he said. "I bet you make me put on a collar and a coat. How you goin' to have the chicken?"

"Roasted."

"Dod blame it! I can't carve a roast chicken. I ain't carved a roast chicken for forty year. I don't see why you can't have—"

"Fried chicken ain't stylish; it's goin' to be roasted!"

Uncle Billy considered the outlook gloomily. He could see the roast chicken skidding across the table and falling in Mrs. Helderbury's lap.

"Kin I have a couple of soft-boiled eggs?" he asked.

"No, you can't!" said his wife. "I ain't goin' to have the party spoiled in no such way and Sister Ann made ridiculous. I been at you these three years to get new uppers and lowers so you could eat decent Christian food. You'll munch your vittles at Ann's party the best you can, and that's an end to that!"

"All right! All right! Don't get rumshus about it! What in tunket are you givin' a party for, anyway?"

"Now, you hark!" said Mrs. Briggs. "You hark and listen to me. It's time in plenty, and more, that Sister Ann was married, and if aught I can do can fetch her and Joe Helderbury together I'm going to do it, your comfort or not your comfort, William Briggs."

"Joe Helderbury! Did you say Joe Helderbury?" asked Uncle Billy amazed.

"That's whom I said," declared Sally. "When a fine, respectable man like Joseph Helderbury is infatuated with my sister—"

"What's infatuated?" asked Uncle Billy.

"Humph! If you don't know it's time you found out," said his wife and it did not seem to Uncle Billy a good time to

press his etymological studies, so he subsided.

THE dinner party was not as miserable for the two men as they had expected it to be. The very inefficiency with which Uncle Billy carved the chicken resulted in a heap of small scraps of white meat—mostly on the tablecloth—and he was able to gather these together and get them on his plate and he made out quite well.

Joe gave himself strictly to food; he was an excellent and well-tried performer in that line.

Now and then during the meal he said "Yes'm" to Mrs. Briggs, or "Yes'm" to Sister Ann or "Yes, mother," to Mrs. Helderbury, and when Uncle Billy cackled, "Have some more chicken, Joe," he said, "Well, I don't mind if I do, Billy," every time.

He ate three pieces of blackberry pie and two pieces of apple. After the meal he sat in quite a docile, almost comatose condition while Sister Ann talked at him. It was a very nice party and Mrs. Briggs did not have to get out the post-card album until almost nine o'clock. She did not have to get out the photograph album at all.

WELL, it was plain enough to see that man was infatuated with you, Ann," Sally said to Sister Ann, when Mrs. Helderbury had tottered home on her son's arm.

Uncle Billy, tilted back on the porch, enjoying a nightcap pipe, pricked up his ears.

"Well, if it comes to that I won't say he ain't a nice man, Sally," Sister Ann said, "and I won't say but what he is lookin' in my direction, but—"

"But what?"

"But I wish you wouldn't say he is infatuated of me, Sally," Sister Ann said. "I don't say you don't mean it all right, but it ain't a word I'd care to have get around as applyin' to him and me, or to anyone I care anything for."

"My goodness!" Sally cried, frightened. "Ain't it a nice word?"

"Is 'vamp' a nice word?" demanded Sister Ann. "It certainly ain't! And to my notion 'infatuation' ain't a whit better, if not worse."

"Law sakes! I—you know I wouldn't use a bad word if I knowed it when I saw it, Ann. I must be frightful mistaken in that word. What does it mean?"

"It means crazy, crazy in love, that's what it means," said Ann. "Wicked crazy, sinful crazy in love. Like the way a nice old married man with a sweet wife will fall head over heels in love with some outrageous vampire person, and nobody know why, and be ready to break up his home for her and spend all his money for her, and land knows what!"

"Why, the old fool! He ought to be ashamed of himself," Sally protested indignantly.

"That's just it," said Sister Ann. "He can't help himself. It ain't his fault. When a man gets infatuated of a woman he's plumb helpless. He can't see nothin' but her, or talk nothin' but her, or think nothin' but her. Home or church or business or reputation don't mean nothin' to him; he just takes after that woman and goes crazy with love. That's what infatuation is, Sally. And goodness knows Joe Helderbury don't show sign of nothin' like that. Not yet, anyway."

"No, I can't say that he does," Sally had to admit, but the information Sister Ann had imparted still amazed her. "Do you honestly believe there is men that can get that crazy, Ann?"

"Believe? Of course, I believe," Ann said. "There's been thousands and thousands of cases. They're in the newspaper every day—young men and old men, gettin' an infatuation for some female they have no business to, and throwin' away home and money—millions of money, mind you. I should think there *was* such a thing!"

"Great sakes!" exclaimed Sally. "Ain't the world awful when you come to know about it all through! I hope to goodness

no man ever gets infatuated of me. I'd be ashamed to look our minister in the face."

"Humph!" said Ann. "There's been cases of ministers gettin' just as infatuated as anybody else."

AS THE DAYS passed, however, it became rather evident to Uncle Billy Briggs at least that Joe Helderbury was not what one might term madly infatuated with Ann.

"Say, look here," he said to Uncle Billy one day, "what's them two females over to your house tryin' to do to me anyway? Tryin' to vamp me? Looks like it now and then, the way they send over blackberry pies and all. If that's what they got in their minds you can go and tell 'em there's nothin' doin'. Not for me. It's a plumb waste of time and pie. Why, Billy, with all due respects to your wife and family and all, I wouldn't want to be caught dead with a marriage certificate for that sister of hers in my pocket. You can tell 'em so, if you want to."

"You tell 'em," Billy grinned.

Uncle Billy did not want to tell anything of that sort. He was having trouble enough of his own already. For one thing, he was breaking in a brand new set of bargain uppers and lowers that the dentist had told him would fit perfectly as soon as his mouth "moulded" to them.

"I'll mould to 'em when I mould to 'em in my grave," Uncle Billy complained to Sally. "My mouth is all raved up and stone bruised. Misery, that's what I'm in with 'em. Dad rat me if I'll wear 'em!"

"You just will wear 'em!" Sally informed him. "Seems to me like you might do a little something for the sake of your own wife's sister. It's just because this family has been lookin' like the last loop of doom that Joe Helderbury is a holdin' off day by day. And I don't know as I blame him one mite. Of all the shiftless, low-grade lookin' men and places you and this property beat all! When you goin' to hang the gate?"

"Now, Sally—"

"When you goin' to paint the fence?"

"Now—now, wait a—"

"Humph! That's you! I don't wonder a body don't want to wed into such a shiftless lookin' family. You trot downtown and buy a screw-driver and some screws and don't let me hear no more words out of you."

IT BECAME sickeningly evident to Uncle Billy that Sister Ann had settled down to a long and tireless siege of Joe Helderbury, aided and abetted by Sally. They might have besieged and welcome, for all Uncle Billy cared, if the young dream of Ann's love had not reacted so unpleasantly upon himself. Because Joe Helderbury's house and yard were always "slicked up" it became necessary for Uncle Billy to slick up the Briggs' place.

The two women did not give him a moment's rest. For weeks they dinged about the gate until at last, in desperation, he did dig it out from under the woodpile and carry it to the front yard.

And if it wasn't one thing it was another. They talked of making him stop smoking on the front porch, and then they *made* him stop. They made him wear his teeth. They went so far as to make him wear his Sunday celluloid collar every day.

WINTER came and the elusive Joe was still as far from the golden chains of matrimony as ever, as far as Uncle Billy could see, and the strain was telling on both Sally and Ann. If they had been snappy before they were positively too much to bear now.

"And that Ann!" Uncle Billy grumbled to himself. "Dad rat if she don't take on like she was a second wife to me, bossin' me around and scoldin' at me. Wish she'd pack up and go home!"

But she did not go home.

"Ann ain't goin' home until something I got my heart set on comes to pass," Sally told Uncle Billy when he ventured

to complain. "Joe's slow. He's shy. But don't you ever fret. He'll come around."

Uncle Billy stood it through the winter. He stood it while the January thaw melted the snow, but he was mighty glum. By the middle of February he was almost melancholy. March and spring would soon arrive, and the two women be at him to slick up the whole place.

He sat in the woodshed, his hatchet in his hand and a small pile of split kindling before him, one February day, glooming and thinking, when suddenly his face burst into a bright and sunny smile.

"Won't go home, won't she? Hang around and tongue lash me, will she? Dad rat it! Won't she? Will she?"

He chuckled, the first time in two months. He put the hatchet gently aside and peered cautiously out of the woodshed door. Sister Ann stood at the kitchen sink, easy to be seen through the kitchen window. Uncle Billy eased himself by running his finger around the inner circle of his celluloid collar, put his pipe carefully away in his pocket and walked to the house. He entered the kitchen and seated himself on the yellow kitchen chair and looked at Sister Ann. For a moment or two she paid no attention to him. Then she turned.

"What you sittin' there like a—" she began, and stopped short. "What ails you? Sick?" she asked.

"I'm just a lookin' at you, Sister Ann," said Uncle Billy. "Just lookin' at the back of your neck. I was out in the shed cuttin' wood and the back of your neck come to my mind and I couldn't help but come in and look at it."

Ann put her hand on the back of her neck.

"What's the matter with it?" she asked sharply.

"It's purty," said Uncle Billy simply. "I like the looks of it. It sort of chirks me up to look at it."

He cackled his silliest laugh.

"You're a fool, William Briggs!" said Ann crossly and went on with her dishwashing.



"It was a very nice party and Mrs. Briggs did not have to get out the post-card album until almost nine o'clock."

Uncle Billy continued to sit and gaze. Now and then Ann put her hand to the back of her neck. She knew something must be wrong there. Once she removed a hairpin and smoothed her hair upward and replaced the hairpin. Uncle Billy sighed deeply.

"Purty, that's what it is!" he said.

"You wait till Sally comes down!" Ann threatened.

"I aim to, if you let me, Ann," Billy said, "I could set here the rest of my life."

ANN ignored him. When she heard Sally coming down the stairs she wiped her hands and went into the dining room. The two women returned together.

"Look here, William Briggs!" Sally exclaimed. "What's all this nonsense? What you mean by talkin' about Ann's back of her neck, I want to know!"

"It's purty," said Uncle Billy earnestly. "You look at it, Sally. You come over here and look at it from here."

"For the land's sake!" cried Mrs. Briggs. "Do you mean to say—"

Words failed her.

"Ann, you go in and red up the front of the house. I'll finish these dishes."

Uncle Billy arose and moved after Ann.

"You sit right there where you be!" commanded his wife. And he did so, meekly enough to satisfy anyone.

"Sally," said Sister Ann the next afternoon, "I don't like to speak of it, but I got to. I'm frightened of the way William is acting. I don't know but what he's gone crazy."

"What's he been up to now?" Sally asked quickly.

"This mornin' whilst you was down to the grocery he follered me wherever I went," Ann complained. "Like a poodle dog."

"Wherever I went there he was, lookin' at the back of my neck—"

"Humph!" said Sally. "He was, was he? I'll back his neck for him!"

Ann hesitated and reddened.

"He kissed the back of my hand," she said. "He grabbed it and kissed it."

"Humph!" Sally exclaimed. "He did, did he? What else, I'd like to know?"

"I don't know but what I'm almost ashamed to tell you the rest," Ann said. "I told him in no soft words what I thought of an old man actin' that way, you make sure of that. He never kicked back at it at all. He waited until I got through and then he said—"

"What did he say?" asked Sally grimly.

"He said I was his own little tootsy wootsy violet, that's what he said," Ann declared, "and the next thing I knew he had them new false teeth of his in his hand and was beggin' me to accept them. He said they was the most precious thing he had in the world and he wanted them to be mine—all mine, uppers and lowers both."

"Ann," breathed Sally in a frightened voice, "he's gone and got himself infatuated of you!"

"Now, Sally, you don't need to look at me like that. I didn't fetch it on. Land knows I don't want an old—"

"No! No! I ain't blamin' you, Ann! I—I don't know that I can blame anybody."

"When a man's infatuated he can't help it; you said so yourself. It's just a vengeance of Providence on me for—"

SHE was interrupted by Uncle Billy himself. He entered through the kitchen and in his hand he carried a potted geranium, one of Mrs. Helderbury's most prized potted geraniums—the one with the two-colored double blooms. It was a large geranium and rose above Uncle Billy's head in brilliant splendor. The pot was large—as large as a pail of wet ashes, and as heavy. With a gentle smile, Uncle Billy crossed the room and placed the potted geranium in Sister Ann's lap. He had stolen it from Mrs. Helderbury's south window as a gift for his love. No infatuated man hesitates at crime.

"It's for you, Ann," he said. "You

keep it; I'm goin' back to get some more for you."

"William!" exclaimed Sally.

Her husband turned his eyes toward her and then looked back at Ann.

"Don't she look cute, holdin' it that way!" he said. "She looks like a bride, don't she?"

"William!" said Sally, more sharply.

Later that afternoon Mrs. Briggs heard Uncle Billy shuffling about in the kitchen and she went there. She meant to say a few clean-cut words to him; words he would understand, but what she really said was:

"William! What are you doin' with that carving knife?"

"Just puttin' an edge on it, Sally," said Uncle Billy, putting down the whetstone and trying the edge of the blade on his thumb nail. He looked through the kitchen window.

"I wonder if Joe has got home yet?" he asked innocently.

"You give me that knife!" said his wife, and she took it from him. "What's got into you, anyhow? Where's my best silver spoons?"

Uncle Billy coughed gently.

"Don't you go and tell me Ann took them off of you, because she wouldn't do any such thing," said Mrs. Briggs.

ANN found the spoons later, in her trunk, a love gift. She did not mind that so much; it was easy to give back Uncle Billy's unwelcome gifts. What she minded was the way he mooned around and made sheep's eyes, and sighed at her. He ate nothing. He would sit at the table and gaze upon Ann and let even soft boiled eggs get cold.

It is true he ate later at Barkalow's restaurant, but that was his own affair. He brought Ann chewing gum and peppermint drops and pink soap and, once, a pair of blue garters with brass buckles. He wrote her letters. They began, "Tootsy wootsy violet."

Mrs. Briggs, however, put them in the kitchen stove.

HOW'S she workin', Billy?" Joe Helderbury asked, when Uncle Billy's infatuation had been proceeding for about two weeks.

"Good, I guess, Joe," Uncle Billy said. "Seems like buyin' this new celluloid collar and the twenty-five cent necktie has worried Sally almost more than all the rest together.

"It ain't like me."

"How'd the carving knife business work?"

"Not so well as you guessed it would, Joe; not so well. I don't like to push nothing like a carving knife too far. I don't like to more'n hint round with a carving knife."

"Have you let your wife catch you kissin' Ann yet?"

"No, Joe; I ain't quite got up spunk for that yet."

"Don't know as I blame you; I'd sort of hate it myself," Joe admitted, "but you got to be infatuated proper if you want it to work. Your wife ain't showed even a sign of bein' jealous yet?"

"They ain't either of 'em showed a sign of nothin' but thinkin' I'm a crazy fool, far as I can see," said Billy.

But he was to see other signs very soon. As his advisor in infatuation Joe Helderbury was strong for the kissing event. He said Uncle Billy could not hope to get his wife really jealous enough to send Ann packing unless there was some real kissing.

"You go in for the kissin', Billy," Joe advised earnestly. "I know about these things; I read the papers regular. Nothin' amounts to nothin' until the kissin' comes. A man can be as infatuated as the dickens for years and years, and until his wife runs across a letter that says somethin' like 'I dream of the sweet kisses by night and by day,' nothin' comes of it. Kissin' is the stuff! Soul kiss; that's what's done the business time out o' number."

"What's a soul kiss?" asked Uncle Billy.

"One of these here Marathon things," said Joe. "Grab and cling. You try it,

Billy. You don't want all this infatuation you've done to go for nothin'."

THE first kiss, as a kiss, was not much of a success. Uncle Billy felt the sting of Ann's hand for almost a week, and it took him half an hour to straighten the side of the ash pail he landed against, but as an awakener of jealousy it was a real triumph.

"Act like an old fool he may," said Sally severely to Ann, "for goodness knows when he ain't so done, but kissin' I will not have."

"Could I help it?" Ann demanded. "I surely smacked him hard enough to teach him."

"I won't have him smacked. You might have broke his leg, hittin' him in the face that way."

"I don't say you've been encouraging him—"

"Sarah Jane Briggs!"

"Now don't up at me like that, Ann," said Mrs. Briggs. "I've known William a good sight longer than you have, and he's no sort of man to get infatuated. What went before all this I don't know—"

"There! That will do!"

"No man gets infatuated of a woman unless she shows signs first off. You may have meant innocent enough, Ann—"

"The idea! The very idea!"

"Tenny rate, I'll have no more kissin' in this house. If there's more of it you can pack and go. And I won't have poor William batted about all over the place. It ain't his fault; if he's gone and become infatuated of you he can't help it. You said that yourself."

"Can I help it if a man gets infatuated of me?" Ann demanded.

"I've nothing to say," said Mrs. Briggs coldly.

"No man ever got infatuated of me, I'll say that much."

"Oh! Oh!" cried Ann, in a white and righteous rage.

She went out and slammed the door. Sarah could hear her throwing her goods and chattels into her trunk in the room

above. She heard the lid of the trunk slam.

MRS. BRIGGS sat and wept, and as she wept she wiped her face with her apron, for the day was hot, a most unusually hot day for the time of the year.

Presently she wiped her eyes and took a cup of sugar from the table and went across the lot to return it to Mrs. Helderbury.

It was then that Uncle Billy came out of the woodshed.

He looked after his wife and walked to the house.

Stealthily he entered by way of the back door and went through the kitchen and met Sister Ann as she came down the stairs.

"My tootsy wootsy vi—" he said, as soulfully as he knew how, and held out his arms.

The next moment the surprised Uncle Billy hit the front door.

"You'll tootsy wootsy me, will you, you old reprobate!" Sister Ann cried, with considerable feeling.

"You'll infatuate yourself onto me, will you!"

Three vases and the center table fell before he wrenched himself out of his coat.

He was one leap ahead of Sister Ann as he cleared the dining room table, and he slammed the kitchen door as he loped out of the house. He went down the back porch steps in one leap and dropped into the cyclone cellar as Sister Ann's infuriated face appeared at the kitchen door. He dragged the door down above him and clung to it, holding it shut.

"Dad rat!" he exclaimed.

The water had not been pumped out of the cyclone cellar since the snow had melted and he stood waist deep and more in it.

"Dad rat; she's a violet, you bet!" he exclaimed as thuds and bangs and thumps fell upon the door of the cyclone cellar.

Sister Ann seemed to be throwing everything in the yard at the cyclone cellar door.

"She's rampagin'!" Uncle Billy said; "she's most surely rampagin'!"

She stopped rampaging almost as suddenly as she had begun, but Uncle Billy did not venture out at once. He felt it might not be best.

"Glory!" he said. "And I only offered to kiss her. I wonder what she would have done if I had kissed her one of them soul kisses that Joe Helderbury told me about! Glory!"

SLOWLY and cautiously he raised the door and peeked out. For a moment he could not believe his eyes. Where his house had been was nothing but a pile of boards protruding from the cellar. The three maples that had stood before the

house were flat on the ground. The front fence was entirely gone.

The early cyclone had done a thoroughly good job. It had made an awful wreck of the old place, but even in his misfortune Uncle Billy's sense of humor was still uppermost.

"Glory!" he exclaimed. "She went and threw the house at me! I wonder what she'd have throwed if I had really kissed her!"

He raised the door a little higher. From between two furrows of his last year's vegetable garden Sister Ann raised herself on her hands and knees and lurched toward him.

"You'll infatuate with me, will you!" she cried.

Uncle Billy closed the cyclone cellar door suddenly. He clung to it with both hands.

AN IMAGINARY BARRIER

Or—Love Finds a Way

By Leslie Van Every

It was John Hapton's first evening with Dorothy Devling, and after they had seated themselves in a hammock, he drew her closer to him and kept her there.

Dorothy enjoyed John very much, but soon she found herself feeling that all was not right. Why did he nervously twist his coat button? And why should the handle on a lawnmower, barely visible through the darkness, furnish a centering place for his gaze? Several moments wore away without a word passing between them.

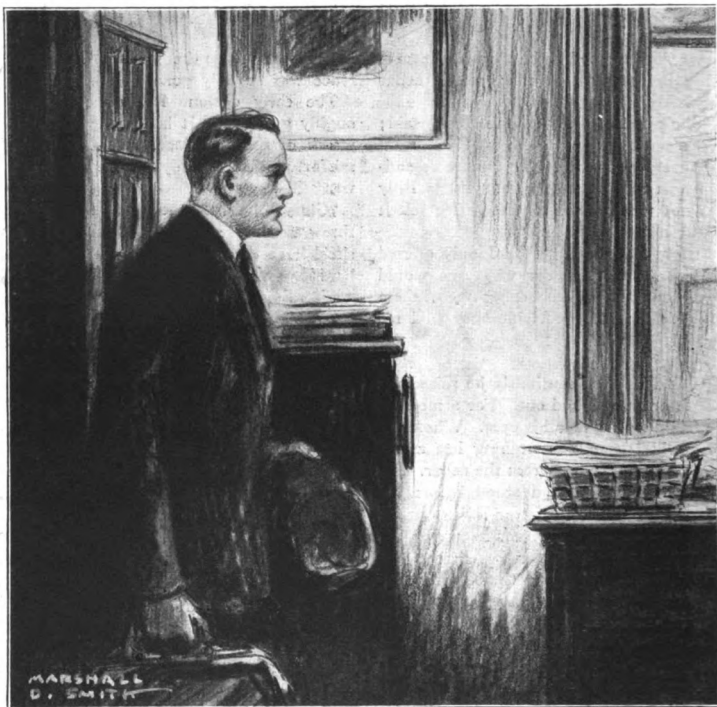
"John," when Dorothy's curiosity insisted on satisfaction without further delay, "John, is there something you would like to tell me, but are scared to? I'd like to—I want to—I must know what it is?"

She then heard a sigh which she knew John had heaved.

"Dorothy, dear," he hesitated, "I—I—can keep it from you no longer. I am—am a heavy stockholder in more than a dozen banks around the country! Can't—can't you like me, just the same?"

Being an impulsive young person, Dorothy's first thought was that she should immediately push him away, then get to her feet as quickly as possible, and order him out of her father's yard! However, the thought that followed was much saner, and before John knew it, his neck was encircled by a couple of feminine arms.

Softly, yet very distinctly, she breathed into his handiest ear, "With all thy vaults, I love thee still!"



"Their scrutiny occupied itself with a slender, strong-

THE FOREMAN OF No. 1

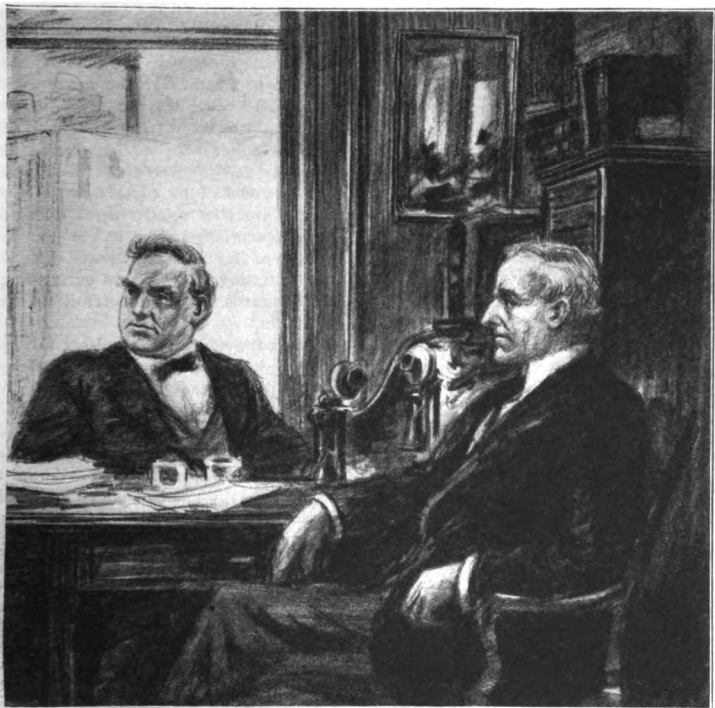
The Story by Newton Fuessle

AT PRECISELY 9:15 by the clock on the fumed-oak shelf, the customary shaft of morning sun entered the office window, and collided with the Masonic watch-charm that adorned the tweed waistcoat of Calvin Smeed. The angle of incidence and the angle of reflection were so adjusted that the beam rebounded, and after the manner of the

beam in the Bible, slid into the eye of Calvin's brother who sat opposite him at the broad flat-top desk.

The latter cocked his head appraisingly to one side, moved his eye out of range of the glistening watch-charm, and said: "How do you like that notice, Calvin?"

"First rate, Horace. I guess it's all right. But I was just thinking that per-



looking figure, slightly stooped at the shoulders."

ACCURACY TAKES CHARGE

Illustrations by Marshall D. Smith

haps we ought to say something about no drifters need apply. I'm getting sick of these fellows who drift in and out."

Calvin tossed the piece of cardboard over to his brother, and sat studying the other's slender countenance.

"You look a little peaked, Horace."

"I feel vastly more peaked than I look," replied Horace. "If you were the treas-

urer of this company, instead of merely its president, there would be one less abdominal bay window in the Bay State Gage Company."

"We're going through a period of deflation," said Calvin. "We've got to take our lean years along with our fat years. We've got a nice reserve tucked away."

"One of these days we may have to tap

it, and that won't be so amusing," answered Horace.

He added a line to the notice before him.

"How does this strike you?"

"That fixes it," returned Calvin.

"I'll tack it up," continued Horace. "If this notice doesn't bring up the right kind of foreman for our Number 1 Shop, we'll have to advertise in some of the papers."

The elder Smeed watched the receding figure of his brother, and, being of a pious disposition, registered a prayerful hope that Providence would send them a new foreman. And then, recalling that the last foreman they had hired had come to them from the city of Providence, he made haste to modify the phraseology of his hope, and turned to the blue prints on his desk.

FOR sixty years the Smeed establishment had manufactured standard gages and limit gages. From small beginnings, the founder of the business had built up a distribution that during his lifetime included the best markets in New England, and that now, under the efforts of his two sons, Calvin and Horace, had become world-wide.

Only the finest quality of non-shrinkable steel went into Bay State gages. The non-shrinkable character of the steel was rivaled only by the non-shrinkable character of the family pride behind the product. The establishment and its product were a monument to accuracy. The solid construction of Bay State gages made it possible to retain their original accuracy even after long and continued use. The Smeed understanding of accuracy expressed itself in gages to test machine screws down to one-ten-thousandth of an inch. Every gage that issued from their plant had to stand this test of almost inconceivable accuracy.

The brothers Calvin and Horace, in a way, were ringmasters of accuracy. It was nothing for them to make infinitesimal fractions leap through all kinds of hoops.

They knew how to make whole caravans of them march through the eye of a needle, and to cause mounted squadrons of these little devils to charge side by side through an opening no larger than the dot over an "i." Even the once proud micrometer had to come down shamefacedly from its solemn perch and fade inconsequentially away before the onslaught of Bay State limit gages. For the speedy testing of cylindrical surfaces and screw threads, the micrometer didn't have a look-in.

When the house of Smeed got through hardening, grinding, seasoning, and lapping a pipe thread gage down to the required degree of accuracy, it was considered the last word. The existence of Bay State limit gages made possible what motor car salesmen glibly call the interchangeability of parts. The tough little implements insured any desired excellence of workmanship and nicety of fit when it came to machined metal parts. So carefully did the Smeeds guard the measuring power of these sensitive contrivances, that they even gave them handles of hard insulating fibre, so that the heat of the hand might not affect the gage. Whether the things were provided with an appliance to prevent the warmth of the operator's yearnings for the bucket of beer of other days during the lunch hour, the "literature" of the company did not state.

CRADLED in the arms of accuracy, the Bay State Gage Company swayed to and fro like a censor in New England's manufacturing circles. Horace and Calvin Smeed were not without pride in the fact that, while others of their generation had permitted businesses handed down to them by their fathers, to go to untimely pot, they had carried on the labors of their vanished parent with industrious enterprise.

The accuracy that justified their product and kept it supreme in its field reflected itself in all their acts. For years they had ordered their lives with utter

accuracy. At table they chose their calories accurately. They drove their cars accurately. They had picked their wives accurately, raised their children accurately, and invested their profits accurately. The peaked look that Calvin detected this morning in the face of Horace gave the former the first trouble intimation that all was not minutely right with Horace.

Horace passed briskly through the accounting department and down the office stairs to the street in front of the factory. Through the foliage of the venerable row of elms broke the sunshine of the May morning, spangling the grey factory walls with jets of glowing light, broken by the shadows of the leaves. Horace cast an accurate eye over the lettering of the notice, chose a conspicuous spot, and nailed the advertisement to the wall.

Then he retraced his steps, paused at the desk of his chief accountant to pick up the latest balance sheet, and resumed his place in the second mightiest seat in the establishment.

"You ought to get out and play more golf," remarked Calvin, with renewed consciousness of the lack of color in his brother's countenance.

"Golf can wait until the right foreman for our Number 1 Shop walks through that door and we get his name on the payroll," replied Horace.

CHAPTER II

INTO the outskirts of the town walked a stranger that bright May morning. On his sturdy shoes was the dust of numerous miles. In one hand he carried a valise that had seen more favorable days, but in his stride were elasticity and composure. With serious eyes he appraised the tranquil streets, the pleasant homes, the vines and hedgerows of the old New England town. He looked with approval upon the air of substantial respectability that embraced his surroundings.

"It's a nice place," he said under his breath.

Ahead of him the orderly structure of the Bay State Gage Company came into view. He had heard the name, had heard of its products. Through the open windows of the shop came the click and gr-r-r-r of the machinery, the familiar smell of lubricating oil, the subtle odor of metals. He stood watching the power-belted traveling its revolving course, and hampers of parts moving to and fro over gravity conveyors, and workmen bending over their lathes.

Moving on, he came upon the notice that Horace had tacked to the factory wall. It read:

FOREMAN WANTED

We want a shop foreman of exceptional qualifications. Must have thorough knowledge of machinist's trade, with record of steady employment and best of references. Must be accurate, sober, and steady. Must be willing to co-operate and must know how to handle men tactfully. The right salary for man of right kind. We prefer a man who has outgrown a more limited field and is ready for bigger things.

Must be satisfied to remain in one place.

The stranger read the advertisement with indifferent eyes. But when he came to the last sentence, his expression changed. A faint smile appeared on his serious lips, and he muttered, half-aloud:

"Must be satisfied to remain in one place."

His first impressions of the town's inviting streets and shrubs and romantic verandahs swept into the front of his mind. Recollections of books he had read and of scenes he had beheld in other days chimed through the corridors of his memory. And he started for the door marked, "To the Office."

"There's a man out here who wants to apply for the job of foreman," the brothers Smeed were soon informed.

"Already?" said Horace.

"Send him in," ordered Calvin.

A MOMENT LATER four Smeed eyes were taking the measure of the applicant. Their scrutiny occupied itself with a slender, strong-looking figure, slightly stooped at the shoulders, standing motionless before them. In one hand the newcomer held a brown felt hat; in the other a dusty satchel. The quality of his grey suit was good; its appearance indicated that it might have been slept in. The lean face was lined and seamed; it was strong in structure and tinged with sunburn. The expression about the mouth was non-committal. The genial, expectant eyes held a look of singular patience; they rested for a moment on each of the Smeeds, and then their gaze retired into space. The head was erect. There was an air of respectful deference about the newcomer.

"Well?" demanded Calvin Smeed.

He was more accustomed to immediate volubility in applicants for jobs.

"You wish to apply for employment?" began Horace.

"Yes."

"Have you had any experience as a machinist?" inquired Calvin.

"I have."

"Where?"

"In the State of New York."

"How long have you been a machinist?"

"Ten years."

"Do you belong to the union?"

"No."

The two Smeeds looked pleased.

"We conduct an open shop," said Horace. "We pay union wages, but we don't like to have a procession of walking delegates telling us how to run our business. I fancy that our plan is better for all concerned."

"So you think you're an experienced machinist?" asked Calvin, surveying the applicant.

"I don't think. I know I am," was the quick reply.

"Do you suppose you can handle men?"

"I never suppose."

"Ever been a shop foreman?"

"I have."

"Over how many men?"

"One hundred and thirteen."

"You know how to handle men, do you?"

"I do."

"You appear to be competent," offered Horace. "How long would it take you to prove to us that you are a competent foreman?"

"Twenty-four hours."

THE assurance of the reply kindled a fire of confidence in both of the brothers. They exchanged favorable glances.

"If you were a man of sober habits," began Calvin—

"That's a contrary to fact condition," broke in the other.

"It doesn't apply."

"You seem to be familiar with the niceties of grammar," smiled Horace.

"I am."

"How long has it been since you took your last drink?" asked Calvin.

"I never drank."

Calvin and Horace exchanged glances of approval.

"Then prohibition hasn't worried you very much," chuckled Calvin.

"Nothing worries me," said the applicant.

"What's your name?" inquired Calvin, reaching for an application form.

"John Hopkins."

"What's your age?"

"Thirty-two years, five months, and eight days."

"Accurate! Eh, Horace?" remarked Calvin, turning to his brother.

"You look older," remarked Horace.

"I imagine you weigh about one hundred and forty pounds," resumed Calvin, making an entry.

"One hundred and thirty-four, striped," answered Hopkins.

"Man of family?"

"No."

"Height?" continued Calvin. "I presume about five feet, seven inches."

"Five, six and three-quarters."
Calvin Smeed put it down.

HORACE was inspecting the applicant with puzzled eyes. Here was a personal equation that was entirely new to him.

"What's the color of your eyes? Blue?" asked Calvin.

"Slaty grey," corrected Hopkins.

"Color of hair?—Black."

"Dark brown."

"Are you satisfied to remain in one place?" demanded Calvin with deliberation.

"I am."

Again the two brothers exchanged looks of satisfaction.

"What salary do you expect?" asked Calvin.

"That's for you to decide," said Hopkins.

"Sixty dollars a week to start. If you make good, we'll raise you to eighty at the end of thirty days."

"All right."

"When do you wish to start?"

"Now."

Hopkins glanced at the office clock. It was a quarter past ten.

"We have an eight-hour day," continued Calvin. "We work from eight to five, with an hour for lunch."

He took a pencil and began to figure.

"You will earn today—let me see—seven dollars and seventeen cents," he added.

"Seven dollars and—" began Hopkins

BUT his words were interrupted by a terrific explosion, apparently in the factory itself. Hopkins did not budge. His composure remained unshaken. His lips remained parted with his uncompleted statement, but he did not finish what he was saying until a second or two had elapsed after the echo of the explosion.

"—and nineteen cents," he said, finishing the statement.

Calvin went over his figures.

"That's right," he agreed. "So you're a bookkeeper too?"

"I am."

"Why did you hesitate after the explosion?" inquired Horace with interest.

"There's usually an after explosion," said Hopkins.

"Not when they're dynamiting rock for a foundation."

"In that case there's always an echo."

CHAPTER II

TEN MINUTES later the new foreman took charge of Number 1 Shop, and began his inspection of men, methods, and equipment. He soon paused in front of one man who was grinding his tools.

"Where are your goggles?" asked Hopkins.

"I never wear goggles," said the other, grinding on.

"Do you want to get a splinter in your eye?"

"I never get a splinter in my eye."

"Put on your goggles."

"Ain't got any."

"Go to the stock room and get a pair."

The machinist looked sullenly into the firmest pair of eyes he had ever faced. Then he put down his tool and started for the stock room.

Hopkins stopped in front of another machinist.

"Does your neck hurt you?" he asked.

"No."

"How long have you been at this machine?"

"Eight years."

"Read this," continued Hopkins, taking a printed slip from his pocket.

The other began to read.

"Shut your right eye and read on."

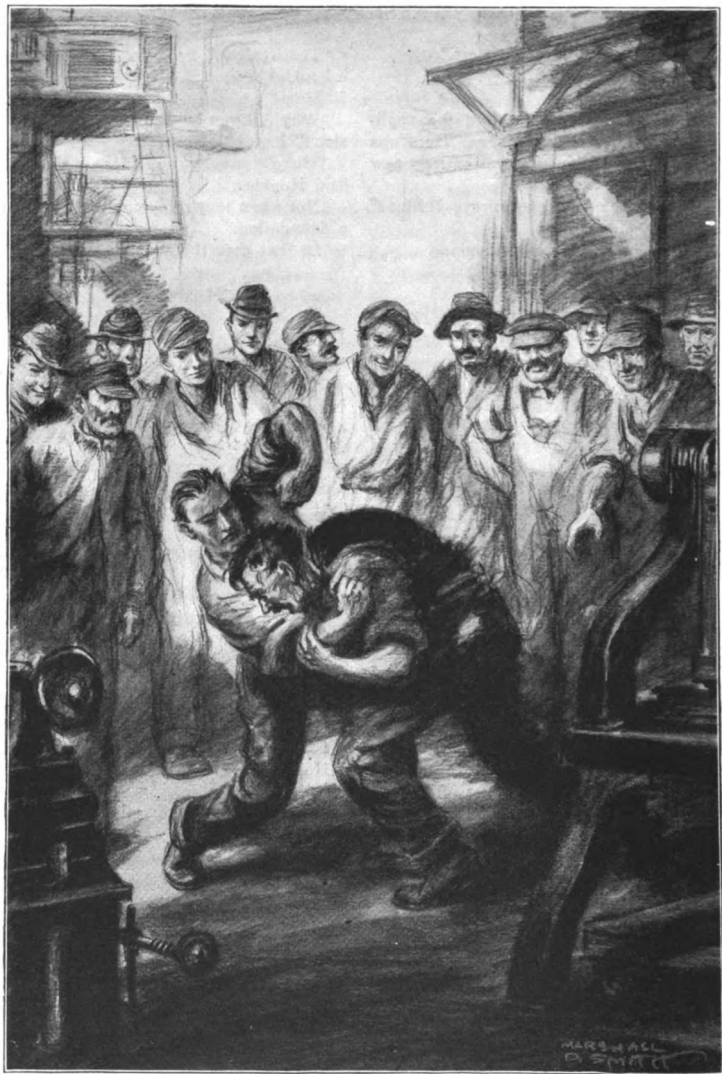
The other obeyed.

"Shut your left eye."

The other did so and stared in silence at the print.

"You need glasses. Go downtown and see an oculist."

"I can't afford to lose the time."



"For an aiming moment, his fist was held poised. Then it came down like a machinist's hammer."

"It's on company time."

The machinist looked gratefully at his foreman, and left his machine.

On the third day Hopkins asked the executive offices for a stenographer.

"Hopkins wants a stenographer," said Horace to his brother.

"Send him one," returned Calvin, "I'll read anything that fellow dictates."

"We'll send you one of our brightest young women," said Horace, speaking to Hopkins again.

"I'd rather you'd send me a man," replied Hopkins, quickly. "I don't know much about women. I don't understand them."

A TEN-PAGE REPORT from Hopkins reached the desk of the Smeeds in a few days. They promptly dropped everything else and examined with care the communication from the foreman. Then they sent for him.

"We have read your surprising report, Hopkins," began Calvin Smeed. "Are you sure of these statements?"

"I am."

"You claim that the personnel of your shop is only thirty-nine per cent physically competent."

"Twenty-nine per cent," corrected Hopkins.

"My mistake," admitted Smeed.

"You claim that nine of the men have pulmonary tuberculosis. How do you know?" demanded Horace.

"They've got persistent coughs, loss of weight and appetite, and night sweats," answered Hopkins. "They've got finger-nails that curve lengthwise, flaring nostrils, and hollow chests. All nine were running from one to two degrees of temperature yesterday afternoon between four and five."

"How do you know?"

"I took it. These men will infect all the men in the shop."

"What do you suggest?"

"Lay them off. Send them to a sanitarium. Most of them can be cured."

"How do you know all these men have

ear trouble?" asked Horace, again consulting the report.

"Cotton in their ears."

"Why do you assume that earache necessarily interferes with competent work?" asked Calvin.

"If you can't hear a machine, you can't run it."

"I think perhaps he's right," said Calvin, glancing at his brother.

"How do you know that all these men have trouble with their teeth?" inquired Horace.

"I've seen them eat."

"You say that thirty-three of the men have sore feet. They work with their hands, not with their feet."

"They have to stand on their feet," answered Hopkins.

"Well, what do you propose to do about it?" inquired Horace, waving his hand at the report.

"Employ a dentist, an eye-and-ear man, and a chiropodist to look after the men on company time," said the foreman.

"It will be quite an expense," objected Horace.

"It costs you more not to."

"Hopkins, it's not improbable that you are right," said Calvin Smeed thoughtfully.

A flush of satisfaction appeared, for a moment, on the pallor of Hopkins' face. Something seemed to light his sombre eyes at this word of recognition from the master of the concern.

CHAPTER III

AMONG the operatives in Hopkins' shop was a middle-aged machinist named Joe Peters. Once, when the plant was threatened with a strike, Joe had saved Calvin Smeed from the attack of an infuriated Bohemian, beating the assailant insensible. Joe had since been one of the most favored of the employees; and only his utter lack of executive ability had prevented the Smeeds from appointing him foreman.

"How do the men take to their new

foreman, Joe?" asked Calvin Smeed one day.

"Some likes him an' some don't," returned Joe guardedly.

"Do you like him?"

"I do not."

"What's the matter with him?"

"He's too nose-y. He's got the place full o' dentists an' foot doctors. He don't make friends. One of the other foremen asked him to play a game o' pool the other night, an' he says he ain't got time. Someone asks him to the house fer supper, an' he wouldn't go. This bird ain't even got a home. Lives in that little company shack back o' the power house. What does a foreman want to live in a place like that fer?"

I FIND that some of the men don't like it that Hopkins lives in that shack we turned over to him," said Calvin later to his brother.

"They prefer a reasonable display of class distinction in their superiors, I suppose," replied Horace.

"Hopkins would disapprove of that supposititious statement," laughed Calvin, stroking his side-whiskers.

"Hopkins is all right," answered Horace. "I'd like to get some more just like him. Best foreman this plant ever had. He showed us yesterday how to increase the output of his shop four per cent by moving two of the drilling machines. He discovered that ten minutes of wasted time could be saved on each operation by cutting a new door through a partition. He does more work after closing time than anyone else does during the whole day."

"That new piece-work tag of his is worth its weight in platinum," put in Calvin. "Queer fellow. I wonder what makes him such a recluse?"

"I don't know that he is," argued Horace. "I dropped in here last night at ten-thirty and found him going over the books with our head bookkeeper. He was showing him some new twists in billing that will save us a lot of money."

"Did you see what he did to our new catalogue? He found sixteen typographical errors and five ungrammatical sentences," said Calvin.

"He's making the dead bones rattle," said Horace with a grin. "I see he has taken a shot at those form letters we are sending to the trade. He claims they're too high-brow. I rather like his revised version."

"How many hours a day does that fellow work?" asked Calvin.

"Eighteen or twenty, I suppose—at least that."

"He'd better look out for his health, I'd say."

"He seems as strong as an ox. I wonder where he got that physique."

"In the army or navy, I suppose."

BEFORE Hopkins had been with the company six weeks, he was being discussed in every department. He had bobbed up everywhere, from the receiving platform to the shipping room, with a suggestion here, a criticism there, an incisive question, a fault-revealing comment, or a thoughtful inquiry that set numerous heads to thinking. There was a searching air in his eyes of slaty grey that combed the place untiringly, gaging this source of instruments of accuracy for hidden inaccuracies. He found rubbish heaps back of the plant and had them removed, lest they might prove the source of a fire. He found the windows in a saw-tooth roof caked up with dirt, and had them cleaned, giving the operatives vastly more daylight to see by. He discovered that the plant's main stairway was unduly steep and fatiguing, and had it ripped out and a better one installed.

Then, rooting around in the basement, he found a hiding place for stolen gages, caught the man who was doing the stealing, learned who the receivers of the stolen goods were, recovered hundreds of dollars' worth, gave the thief a memorable talking to, and let him return to his machine.

ONE DAY the sales manager burst into the office of the Smeed brothers and demanded: "Who is this unsmiling guy around here who rattles off mental arithmetic like a computing machine?"

"Hopkins," replied the brothers in concert.

"What is he?"

"He's foreman of our Number 1 Shop."

"There's something uncanny about that cuss," said the sales manager. "He's been showing me where our price list is all wrong."

"I suspected that it was only a matter of time before he would start shooting holes through our price list. He's already shown us where nearly everything else about the place is full of goat feathers," remarked Calvin, playing with his Masonic charm.

"This fellow showed me where a lot of our products are priced so low that there is no margin of profit, and where many of our prices to the trade can safely be lowered without losing money. If his figures are right—"

"I've never known his figures to be wrong," declared Horace.

"Then it gives us one awful jump on our competitors. If production costs have been dropping, why hasn't the sales department been informed?"

"Production costs have only been dropping since Hopkins has been with us," answered Calvin Smeed. "And that has been for less than two months."

CHAPTER IV

JOE PETERS was eyeing every step of Hopkins' progress in the organization with open resentment. His upper lip twisted into a sneer every time he heard a good word spoken of the foreman. He ridiculed every act of kindness of the foreman toward one of the workmen. He scoffed at every innovation introduced by Hopkins.

"Say, Joe, what have you got against him, anyway?" protested one of his shopmates, whom Hopkins had befriended.

"He's a bad actor. I don't trust him."

"You talk like a fish. What about the new bonus system he got fer us? What about the new lunch room? What about more pay for overtime? What about the sick benefits? What about—"

"Don't talk to me!" roared Joe Peters. "I know him. I hate his guts. An' one o' these days I'll show him up."

The hatred of Joe Peters for the foreman was soon felt by the whole shop. It introduced an element of dramatic tension and suspense. Every workman felt its pressure. Never did Hopkins draw near the machine where Peters worked that scores of furtive eyes did not follow the foreman's lean figure. Some day there was going to be a crack of thunder, and the men all wanted to be on hand when that day came.

The mystery that surrounded Peters' antagonism only heightened the suspense and rendered speculation more acute. What was there between these two? What could be back of this look of ferocious hostility that smoked in Joe Peters' eyes?

"Look out for that fellow Peters," urged one of the machinists at length.

"Why?" asked Hopkins, with customary composure.

"He's got something against you. He'll do you dirt," warned the other.

A faint smile swept the foreman's thin lips, and he quietly resumed his discussion of his work.

As time wore on, it became apparent to Number 1 Shop that the crisis between Peters and the foreman was rapidly approaching. Joe's savage attitude emerged more and more into the open. It no longer consisted of ugly talk behind Hopkins' back. Joe now scowled brazenly at the foreman every time he came near. The machinists watched Hopkins closely for its effect upon him, and were amazed and mystified at his forbearance. A few noticed a tightening of his jaws, a glint in his eyes, but that was all. Save for these hardly perceptible evidences of being aware of the wave of Peters' enmity,

the foreman seemed unconscious of the other's existence.

"Did yuh see the way I glared at him today?" boasted Peters at length. "And did yuh see him stand for it? He's a dog-gone coward."

JOE'S shopmates wondered. They began to question the courage of the man who ignored these repeated affronts. They began to suspect that this was the beginning of the end of Hopkins' rule in the shop. Joe Peters began to assume new importance in their eyes.

One day Joe boldly took a pint flask of whiskey from his pocket, and knowing that the foreman was looking in that direction, raised it to his lips and took a drink.

Fifty pairs of eyes were on Hopkins, but his face did not change. He sauntered slowly on. Reaching Joe's side, he struck the flask a smart blow and drove it with a crash to the concrete floor.

Fifty machinists caught their breath.

Without so much as turning to see the effect of his act upon Peters, the foreman looked at his wrist watch. It was a little past five. For once the engineer had failed to turn off the power on time. Hopkins crossed to the power switch, pulled the lever, and silenced the roar of machines.

The silence that followed differed singularly from the ordinary cessation of work at five. The usual scrape of feet and sound of voices and of whistling were absent. Every man seemed locked to his place. All eyes were fastened on Joe Peters. Their minds were moving forward to the coming spectacle. The hush of a great expectation had descended upon the shop.

Caught in the hush that held the big shop, Joe Peters was still staring dumbly at the shattered glass on the floor in front of him; the foreman's unexpected act seemed to have left the other dazed and wondering. This was not the kind of fight technique to which he was accustomed. The preliminaries of his fights

had always consisted of vocal abuse of an opponent. It helped coil his muscles to strike. This strange attack without words seemed to paralyze him.

In a daze he looked about him, perceiving on every hand the waiting eyes of the men, growing slowly aware of the silence that hedged him in. It was a silence that terrified him, brooded over him in judgment. When his slow mind began to work, it dawned upon him that the foreman had got the better of him. The only sound he heard was the sound of calm, receding footsteps. He would have known those footsteps in the darkest night, their even cadence, their maddening confidence.

Suddenly Joe's dry mouth opened. He inhaled a lungful of air and gave a bellow.

"Come back here, yuh dirty dog!" he yelled.

THE eyes of all the shopmen, gleaming from dirt-streaked faces, sprang to the figure of the foreman.

"You, Hopkins!" roared Peters.

At the cry of his name, the foreman turned leisurely. His eyes narrowed, as if looking into a gale. The composure that never left his face was in control of his seamy countenance.

Some of the men stepped back to clear the way for the onslaught. They saw Peters tighten the strap around his waist, saw him lower his head like a heavy animal about to charge. He was advancing slowly, his feet apart, his head bent to one side. Joe's face was almost crimson; even his eyes looked red. He was cursing the foreman in a low voice, with a relish for every oath, feeding greedily upon it before it was spoken.

The eyes of the spectators swung to and fro between the adversaries, comparing size and weight and structure, realizing that Peters had fully thirty pounds the better of the foreman, four inches the advantage in height, and much the longer reach.

"He'll wring his neck," whispered someone.



"Do I stay on the job or not? What's the answer?"

"Who will?" asked another.

"Joe Peters."

"What the hell yuh waitin' fer?" demanded Joe thickly. "Yuh stinkin' coward! Wait'll I get my hands on yer neck! I'm going to strangle yuh!"

ALL THE MEN in the shop had seen their share of fighting. They had seen men attack each other in rings, on streets, in alleys, on ships. But this affair was something different. This grotesque advance, this self-possessed waiting, the blood-freezing language of this one and the silence of this other, these mysterious waves of hatred that streamed from foe to foe—the thing was incomprehensible and almost terrifying.

Joe Peters' black arms were raised in guard; he was expecting the motionless foreman to spring at him and open the encounter.

"Come on, you eel!" said Joe throatily.

He opened and clenched his hands as if they were mouths already munching the flesh of his opponent, as if his fingers were teeth already crunching his bones.

"Come on, yuh rattler, an' show some fight," he added viciously.

All of a sudden the firm, clear voice of John Hopkins was heard.

"You're working over time" he said. "Get the hell out of here."

Joe Peters, in reply, made a jump for the foreman's throat. The act broke the tension of the onlookers, and with a fight-hungry gasp they surged forward to watch the encounter.

The fist of Hopkins struck an accurate blow. It stopped his opponent's lunge, cracking him on the side of the jaw, and cutting a gash that brought a yowl of rage from the machinist.

"I'll butcher yuh fer that!" promised Peters.

Blow after blow he lashed at the foreman's body without sparring or footwork. He swung continuously, monotonously, landing now on the face, now on the body, now only grazing his opponent, now missing entirely. He kept assuring

Hopkins in broken declarations that he was going to kill him and spit on his grave.

Among the onlookers were men who marvelled that these smashing blows did not destroy the foreman. The power of this man to endure punishment was something almost unbelievable. Where could he have learned to fight?

"Look at Joe!" yelled a voice.

PETERS had plowed his way through a bombardment of Hopkins' blows. There was a flash of white, and Joe's teeth were imbedded in the foreman's arm. Hopkins' face was seen to be tight with pain, but no cry came from him. Suddenly his free arm rose into the air. For an aiming moment, his fist was held poised. Then it came down like a machinist's hammer against the base of Peters' skull. Most skulls might have split under the blow; but not Joe Peters'. His eyes rolled; his mouth opened; his teeth relinquished their meat.

The spectators who knew anything about fighting, expected to see Peters collapse. But they saw him do something else.

Joe grabbed a loose casting.

"Now!" he cried with a ring of deadly triumph in his voice.

Joe's red eyes measured the distance to the foreman. The hand that clutched the casting drew back.

Again the foreman's face did not change or blanch. But with agility he sprang to one side, and, apparently without having to look, but seeming to know precisely where it was near one of the bending machines, he seized an iron bar.

Out of the eyes of Peters died the gloating look of a moment before. His teeth locked. His face grew grey as the meaning of the iron bar in Hopkins' hands imbedded itself in his brain.

"Ch-ris!" shuddered one of the spectators.

The pack of men surrounding the fighters swayed with revulsion from these weapons of death. A good fight was one

thing. But butchery was another thing.
"Cut it out!" shrieked a voice.

CHAPTER V

THERE was a pounding of feet on the concrete floor, and a dozen men sprang between the enemies. What followed not even the nearest onlooker could have described accurately. With Peters' casting about to be hurled, and Hopkins' bar about to swing, the combat suddenly broadened into a general scrimmage. Yells and blows were heard. A fierce uproar filled Number 1 Shop. It rang through the whole plant, and made its way in weird echoes to the executive office.

"What's that?" cried Calvin Smeed.

"It seems to be in Number 1 Shop," exclaimed Horace.

Both shot a glance at the clock. It was almost five-thirty. They knew that the shops should have been deserted. There were looks of alarm on their faces. These sinister sounds denoted—what? A strike? The two brothers hurried toward the uproar. They burst into the shop and ran toward the crowd of machinists.

"What's all this about, Joe?" demanded Calvin Smeed.

Straining in the hands of his captors, Joe began shaking his fist at the foreman and screamed:

"Ask him who he is! Ask him where he come from?"

"Ask him where he learned his trade?" shrieked Peters. "Ask him how he come to run a drill? Ask him where he used to boss a machine shop? Ask him where he learned to keep books? Ask him where he learned to figure in his head? Ask him where he learned to fight? If he don't tell yuh, by God, *I will!*"

THE FOREMAN was gazing undisturbed at his accuser. His lean lips parted.

"I'll answer those questions, Mr. Smeed," said Hopkins.

"If he don't—" began Joe.

"Keep still, Joe," ordered Horace.

"I learned my trade, how to handle men, accuracy, how to keep books, how to fight—in Sing Sing."

Only the sound of men breathing was heard in the shop.

"You didn't ask me where I had worked, or I'd have told you," continued Hopkins. "They gave me ten years for forgery, three years for receiving stolen goods, two years and ten months off for good behavior.

"You asked me if I belonged to the union," continued Hopkins, "but you didn't ask me why not. You didn't ask me why I was satisfied to stay in one place. You didn't ask why I wouldn't dictate to a woman. For the last ten years the only woman I saw was a prison matron, and she through steel bars twenty feet away. I learned mental arithmetic as a bookmaker on racetracks. I learned machinery in stripes. I learned to keep my eyes peeled as a trusty. I learned to keep my mouth shut in solitary confinement. I learned discipline in a cell. Do I stay on the job or not? What's the answer?"

On Calvin Smeed's face was a look of doubt. He glanced at Horace.

"Hopkins," he began, "I guess—"

"Don't guess!" pleaded Hopkins, his voice thickening.

"You stay with us," said Horace with finality.

"Where do I get off?" growled Joe Peters through swollen lips.

"It's up to Hopkins," replied the head of the New England firm.

PETERS came a step forward. Only Hopkins perceived in his movements the peculiar hitch of the lock-step.

"Well?" queried Peters, directing an anxious look into the eyes of a better man, "how about it?"

"Tomorrow morning—back to your lathe," answered Hopkins, dusting his hands laconically, and starting across the cinders of the compound toward his shack.

A "JOB" ON DOUBLE PAY

By Henry Leverage

Illustrations by Ray C. Strang



THE silver-gray-haired man who walked along Delphia Street was neither young nor old—handsome nor inconspicuous. He had that which nature give to youth—a sprightly stride, and that which wisdom grants to age—a super-caution horn of experience.

Chester Fay, alias Edward Letchmere, had met, that day, in the lobby of the

city's best hotel, a man whose fur coat, slaty eyes and crunching jaw, bespoke the politician.

Dan Grogan wasted no words: "Go out Delphia Street, knock on the door of No. 9, tell th' old boy who lives there I sent you, an' listen to wot he has t' say. You're th' only crook on earth can do wot he wants done. Th' only one!"

And when you are down and out, police-hounded, wanted in a score of cities, with a price on your head—Dan Grogan's suggestion was worth considering.

Chester Fay timed himself to reach No. 9 at seven o'clock, a magic hour for porch-climbers, diners, or those who wish to avoid being seen by detectives.

No. 9 proved to be, when seen from across the street, a marble house surrounded by an iron-grilled fence whose one gate opened upon a flight of stone steps crowned with double bronze doors. There was a soft light on every floor.

Fay went swiftly across the street, and pressed the button he found set deep in the stone-work at the side of the bronze doors.

A wait ensued, tense and pregnant with possibilities. Fay looked back over Delphia Street, which slashed the city like a sword of fire. He studied the shadows cast by the trees that fringed the sidewalks. Detectives might be in lurking. Dan Grogan's influence, and it was great, could not save him from arrest for crimes committed in other cities.

Doors to Fay indicated their owner's individuality to some extent. He turned on a rubber heel and studied the one before his clean-cut face. In fancy, something had driven fear from his brain and left in its place pleasing memories of old cities, mellow cathedrals—a world where

art was supreme. The doors were Milanese. Fay knew Italian work when he saw it.

He felt for the button a second time and ranged his scrutiny upon arabesques, scrolls, inlaid copper-scales—and then a door began opening until it framed a girl who was dark, Madonna-eyed, and timidly retiring.

"I believe I'm expected," said Fay.

"Who—sent you?"

"A politician."

"Please come in."

Checking every clue and action, no matter how trivial, Fay surmised in that split-second before he entered the door that Dan Grogan had telephoned the owner of No. 9.

He pressed past the girl and saw her strain to close the heavy door. It was closed before he could aid her.

"This way, please," she said and led the way through an oppressive hall where hung silken tapestries, oils, armor, skins, and plaques crossed by swords from Damascus and Kobie.

Fay removed his checked cap which matched so well his suit of tweeds and well-worn overcoat. He got to the heart of the mansion in one swift drawn breath. Either its owner was a receiver of stolen goods or else a collector of discernment.

THE rear room, where the girl paused outside the door, was heavy with silence and objects of art, dimly revealed under the glow of an inverted lamp whose dome was composed of rock-crystals.

Fay entered this room. He saw the frail girl motion one hand toward a chair. He sat down facing a mirror, while at his side was a Japanese inlaid screen.

The mirror was set at two angles. Fay stared at a reflection in the glass and gripped the arms of his chair. An old man, whose skin was drawn like parchment, and whose eyes might have swept over the rail of a corsair's quarter-deck, was regarding him from around the screen.

"A simple precaution," chuckled the

man. "You see me by reflection, young man. Your testimony as to my identity would not be accepted in a court of law."

"The same applies to your view of me," suggested Fay.

He heard a senile snarl at the quick sally.

Fay waited with every nerve alert, and saw, out of the corner of his eye, the frail girl leaning an elbow on a table, as she regarded him with the fixed position of a statue cut in jade.

He could observe both girl and reflected image of the man at the same time—a gift given to crooks and those who fence with danger.

The man, the silent girl, the oppressive room brooding with wealth, caused Fay to carefully weigh a question:

"What do you want with me?"

The face in the V-shaped mirror came closer. A chair creaked on the other side of the screen and reaching talons appeared in the polished surface of the glass.

"I'm Hawes," said the man. "Richardson Hawes. Ever hear of me?"

"Can't say that I have."

"I am fortunate."

"Why?"

"Then my name will be easily forgotten—for I'm going to pay you to forget it after you do a little work for me. Our friend, whom you met at the hotel, phoned and said a real smart climber was coming up. I'm a trifle disappointed—I expected an older one than you."

Chester Fay ran his fingers through his prematurely gray hair. He shot a glance at the girl, and then leaned toward the man's yellow reflection.

"What is it you want me to do, Mr. Hawes?"

The man raised a hand and pulled down a skull cap. His teeth clicked:

"Do? Why, my friend, we're going collecting, you and I."

Again Fay shot a sally:

"Your place looks as if you had done considerable collecting."

Fay moved an arm and indicated the walls, the peach-blow vases—ceramics,

Sevres ornaments, old masters, steel-green tapestries and rugs about the room.

"Quite a bit of collecting!" he repeated.

Hawes rasped:

"Turn this way! Look at me! Are you game, young man, to get an urn from a closely-guarded museum—a museum where five men walk with loaded pistols at night?"

Fay closed his eyes. There was but one museum in the city answering Hawes' description. He had visited it on a Sunday afternoon and had come away with a memory of guards, bars, alert guides, and a general idea that whatever valuable was there—would remain secure so far as he was concerned.

"I know the place," said Fay.

"Yes? You looked it over?"

"I did!"

Fay sensed that Hawes' glance was upon the girl, who had removed her elbow from the table and sat erect with her hands in her lap. Her features stood out from a purple curtain.

"Ever hear of the Grecian Urn?" asked Hawes.

"I know Keats's poem—or part of it."

"Then you will be able to pick out the Urn. The object I want added to my collection is the one that Keats wrote the Ode about. The Urn was purchased from the Beardsley collection and placed in the Gold Room of the museum. I'll pay two thousand for that Urn, delivered to me."

"Oh, father!" cried the girl.

"Shut up, Oenone!"

Hawes made as if to rise from his chair. Fay saw the old man's slippers, trousers, and brocaded dressing-gown. Then Hawes sat down.

"Father," wept the girl. "Keats's Urn? Don't take that. Remember—your narrow escape—"

"Shut up!"

FAY saw a tear start from the girl's limpid eye and fall to the old lace that covered her gown. Her profile moved across the purple curtain, vanished in a shadow, appeared, poised, and turned im-

ploringly toward her father's reflection in the mirror. Fay waited a moment then rose from his chair and glided over the rugs until he stood before an oil painting depicting an old woman trimming her nails.

"This picture was in the Munich Gallery. It's a shame to hide such a masterpiece in a private gallery. No wonder your daughter—"

Hawes gripped the edge of the Japanese screen with both hands. "Sit down!" he ordered. "Come back and listen to my proposition!"

Fay crossed the room and sat down. It occurred to him that the owner of the house was a miser in art. The objects in the room had been stolen and hidden away from the world. Some of them he recognized from police descriptions sent broadcast at the time they were lost. A vase in a corner had undoubtedly come from the Winheimer place. He recalled the robbery—a particularly daring example of porch-climbing.

Then, there was a set of Burgundian tapestries which had been pilfered from a peer's yacht at Cowes. Fay looked keenly upon them, nodded faintly at the girl, and turned his attention to the crafty features of Hawes—collector extraordinary.

"My proposition," explained Hawes, "is, that we go to the museum, soon after midnight, climb the building, lower a ladder into the Gold Room, and secure the Grecian Urn."

Fay waited.

"For your services in the enterprise I will give you two thousand dollars. There is little danger—if you are what I think you are—a clever thief."

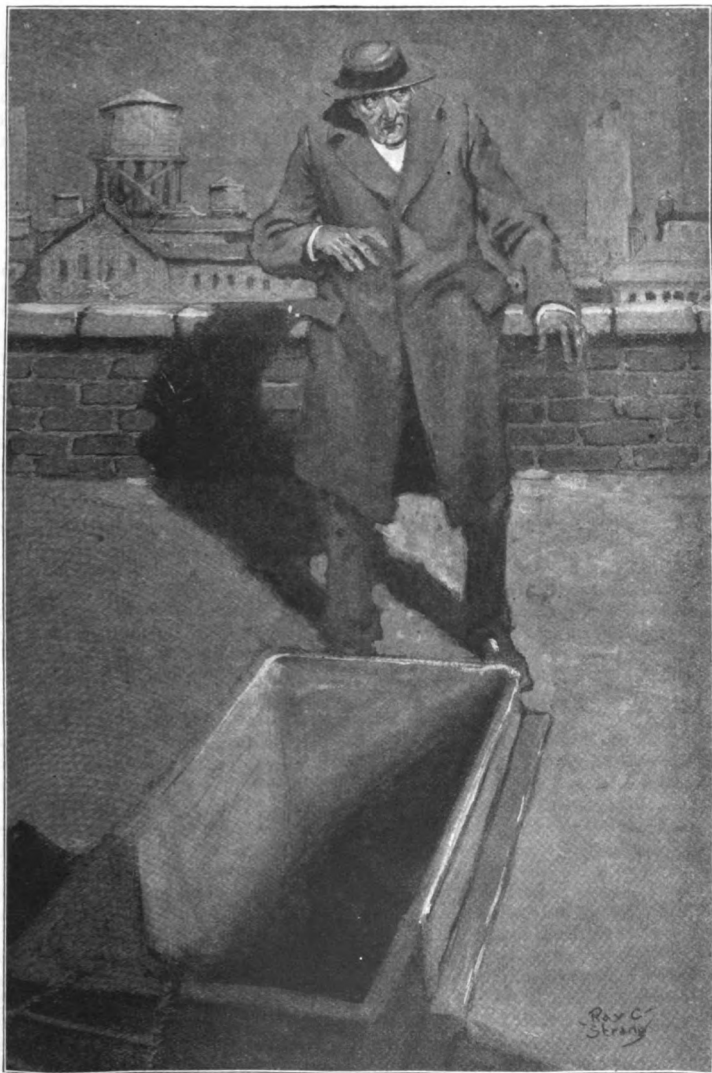
"I'm not one-half as clever as you are, Hawes. Look at your collection and then look at my cuffs."

Fay jerked down his hands and showed the serrated edges of two soiled cuffs.

"You need the money?"

"I certainly do!"

"Then we will get the Urn, tonight. I have the ladder, hooks, everything! I



"Hawes resembled a wrinkled bat blinking at a tree-toad."

also have a diagram of the building—the hours when the watchmen change.”

Fay inspected Hawes's features. They were those of a man who would take care of everything.

“This collecting habit?” he asked. “How long have you been obsessed with it?”

“Not long enough to get everything I want! I have been suspected, once or twice, of receiving goods stolen by clever men like you.”

Fay was not flattered. He went to the center of the proposition made by Hawes.

“If I steal the Urn, and bring it here—the world will be that much poorer.”

Hawes chuckled.

“And I'll be that much richer. Why should Keats's Urn rest in a dusty museum?”

“Oh, father!”

FAY turned when Oenone sprang erect and pressed her hands against her breast.

“Think, father, of the crime of it! It was only yesterday that a class of high school girls came from another city to see the Urn. They are going to write odes and make the world beautiful by their thoughts. Isn't there commercialism and bartering and cheating enough on earth! Isn't there?”

“Sit down, Oenone!”

The girl reluctantly sat down. Fay remembered that Keats's Ode concerned the figures on the Urn. Through his brain half-remembered words and lines—brought to mind by their haunting melody—

“What little town by river or shore . . . Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter . . . Unwearied—forever piping songs forever new—”

He wished himself well out of Hawes's proposition—but there were the raveled cuffs—the grind of poverty and hungry-despair to urge him on.

“I'll help you get the Urn!” he said.

Hawes reached a hand around the screen. “I knew you would. My polit-

ical friend said you were capable of anything.”

“Suppose, Hawes, we are both caught?”

“There should be some way out of it.”

“What would happen if they found the Urn here, afterwards?”

Hawes spread out his wrinkled hands as he spoke:

“I'll take that chance, young man! The thing to do, is not to leave a clue.”

“Will they suspect you when the Urn is missing?”

“No! I'm seventy-two years old. Who would think I could climb a rope-ladder and descend into the Gold Room? You're going to do that part—for me.”

Fay rose and looked over toward the door.

“All right, Hawes. I'll be here at twelve o'clock, or anywhere else you say.”

“Come back here!”

Fay fingered his cap.

“I want a thousand down before I start—and another when I deliver the Urn into your hands.”

“The money will be waiting.”

Fay followed the girl through the door, along the thickly-rugged hall, and paused with her in the foyer.

“Don't come back,” she whispered.

“Why not?”

“Father would sell his soul for the Urn. Your soul is yet your own.”

“You love Keats.”

“Above all poets.”

“Then, Oenone, don't worry.”

Fay pulled open a bronze door, glanced keenly up and down Delphia Street, and walked away from the house.

He avoided the early-evening crowds, detoured around the city, and came with lanky strides to the park within which stood the museum. Its copper covered roofs lifted above the bare tree branches—its lights glowed yellow through the cutting air of early fall.

He studied the museum from a score of angles. He considered every possible getaway. There was no use going on the job of securing the Urn without taking precautions.

HAVING decided on his plan of action in case of discovery, Fay went back to the city and purchased a few articles in a drugstore—collodium for finger-tips, safety-razor blades which could be used in cutting putty around glass, and tinted spectacles to cover the entire upper portion of his face.

Pocketing his purchases, he walked in silent streets until midnight. Many thoughts went surging in and out his brain. He was almost broke—the police of half a dozen cities had a price on his head. Hawes offered the only easy money in sight.

The cracksman and climber made one compact with himself when he hurried toward Number Nine, Adelphia Street. Hawes was a yellow-hearted scamp, and therefore Hawes had better watch out.

Fay looked around the street, watched a passer-by, then crossed to the iron-grilled fence before Hawes's mansion, where one light burned on the lower floor.

Oenone opened a bronze door. Fay entered the house, realizing that the servants, and there must have been many, were away that night.

The girl inclined her head and indicated that he should wait. He looked at her, then heard a shuffling step in the hall. Hawes appeared wrapped in a storm coat, muffled with a black silk muffler to the ears, and masked by a down-pulled brim of a soft hat which had seen much wear.

The collector buttoned his coat. "I've got everything!" he declared. "Let's go!"

"You and that man are miserable thieves!" exclaimed Oenone.

Fay bowed to the indignant girl, then said to the old man:

"Half the money in advance. One thousand down!"

Hawes handed over the money. Fay counted it and distributed it in three pockets. The crinkle of new bills sent a glow through his veins. It was the first big money he had possessed in weeks.

"I'm ready," he said.

The girl crept away from the door and

wrapped her hands in the lace of her gown.

"Oh, father!" she sobbed. "Keats's Urn! You're both cowards—to take that."

Hawes gripped Fay's arm at the elbow.

"My collection is not complete until I get it," he chuckled through the muffler. "And here's the man to get it. Eh?"

"Sure!" said Fay.

THEY left the mansion, closed the gate, and when they had crossed the street, Fay looked back. Oenone was framed in the doorway. Her arms went out in an appealing gesture.

Fay fell in stride with Hawes, who showed surprising agility for a man seventy-two years of age.

Said Hawes: "It's twelve-thirty. Have you looked over the museum?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of it?"

Fay walked a block.

"I've robbed better protected places than the museum. Five guards, you say?"

"Yes, five! All carry pistols."

The green lift of the copper roofs showed among the tree branches. Hawes drew Fay along a high wall, through a foot-passengers' gate at the side of a driveway, and led him by roundabout trails to a low shed, wherein were stored lumber and crates.

"We're safe here," said Hawes. "We'll wait."

Fay looked at the museum, counted the windows—saw that the lights were out on the upper floors, then turned to Hawes. The aged collector had unbuttoned his black coat. From around his waist he removed a rope-ladder made of silk cords, and short, steel cross-pieces. Hooks were attached to one end of the ladder. The cross-pieces clinked when Hawes unsnarled the knots.

"It's been used before," he said drily. "It'll bear the weight of two men as light as you."

"I need no ladder, going up! See that

water-spout between those two windows? Then the cornice not far out? Let me have the diagram, Hawes."

The collector covered his chin with the muffler, and drew from a pocket a sheet of rice-paper which had evidently been removed from a catalogue.

Fay's eyes were accustomed to discerning objects in the semi-darkness. He had spent some years of his life in a cell. He handed back the diagram. "The Gold Room is locked by guards at night. There's a shutter between it and the outer rooms. I can go up the water-spout, swing myself down an air-shaft, and cut through one of the windows."

Hawes's eyes glittered.

"The air-shaft has come under my observation. I thought of it. I went through the museum with the curator—a friend of mine. It strikes me, young man, that guards pass out of one door and into another at the bottom of the air-shaft."

"Granting that, Hawes, I'll bear them in mind. Suppose I climb to the roof, drop the ladder to you, and you come up. There is danger, but we will chance it."

Hawes covered his face with an arm and peered around the edge of the shed. He stepped on a board, drew back with a start, then looked again. Fay stared at the silk muffler that wound the collector's throat. It was like a mottled shell from which the old man's head turned and twisted, turtle-fashion.

"All right?" he queried when Hawes stepped into the shed.

"Yes. You go up and swing down the ladder. It's thirty-six feet from the ground to the roof."

FAY thought of Oenone—the rich mansion—the trophies of a collector's life; and then of the Urn. He gathered up the rope-ladder, slung it under his arm, pulled out the goggles he had purchased at the drug-store, adjusted them, and walked swiftly to the museum's wall.

Winding the ladder around his neck, he listened, looked at Hawes who stood

in the shadow of the shed, then mounted the water-spout by grasping it with both hands and finding stone and iron projections all the way to the cornice.

The noise he made was slight. The cornice bothered him—for it was thrust to a considerable distance from the edge of the roof. He got over it, hooked a knee around a gutter's bend and looked down at the collector, who had come out in the open space between the shed and the museum.

Hawes resembled a wrinkled bat blinking at a tree-toad. Fay waited a minute, heard the striking of a church clock, then smeared his finger-tips with collodium, lowered the ladder, being careful not to tangle it, and secured the steel hooks in the water-gutter at the edge of the cornice.

The silk ropes creaked, strained, turned slowly as the hooks dug deep within the tin of the gutter. Hawes appeared, thrust one arm over the edge, breathed asthmatically, and shot at Fay a despairing expression.

Fay gripped him under the arms, braced his feet, and tugged. Hawes came across the cornice and lay gasping on the roof.

"Close call that," said Fay. "A little more and you would have let go."

Hawes tried to answer—roamed his eyes over the roof, shivered, and then sat erect.

"They'll never suspect me of making that climb," he breathed. "Never!"

"You're a crooked snake," thought Fay. "You think of everything," he added aloud. "Even your age is your alibi."

Hawes pressed a hand on the copper roof, turned his head, and, lifting the other hand, pointed.

"There's the air-shaft. Pull up the ladder."

Fay pulled the ladder up, unhooked it, crawled across the roof, and bending down, studied the shaft with a view to finding a place to re-hook the ladder. He found none near the edge of the shaft.

He saw two windows about twenty feet below. These opened into the Gold Room. Slate sills marked the window bottoms.

THERE SOUNDED, as he searched the shaft, the grating of an iron door on stone, and then the light of a guard's lantern illuminated the concrete basement.

A guard appeared, opened another door, passed in—and again the sound of iron on stone was heard.

"They go by every hour," imparted Hawes, close to Fay's shoulder. "You've got that long to work in, young man."

Fay felt the edge of the shaft. He studied the window below him. The upper panes were dusty. The lower sash had been raised from the sill an inch or more.

"That's for ventilation to the Gold Room," he said, pointing to the opening. "I won't need to remove a window-pane. That window will come up."

"Hurry!"

Fay felt around—moved away from the edge of the air-shaft, and found a skylight where hooks could be secured firmly enough to support the weight of himself and the ladder.

"I don't know if the ladder is long enough," he said, eyeing Hawes's neck-scarf.

"We better tie your scarf onto the end and make sure. Don't mind lending it, do you?"

Hawes unwound the scarf, turned his coat collar up, and watched Fay lengthen the rope-ladder by at least, five feet. The scarf was silk and stronger than the ladder.

Fay wasted no time after he tested the knot.

He examined his fingers, clipped his goggles firmly behind his ears, and went over the edge of the air-shaft.

Down ten feet, he waited, swung—let go the last rung of the ladder, and descended the scarf hand under hand, until his toes touched the stone-sill. He

crouched on this sill and looked up at Hawes.

The collector motioned a trembling signal.

Fay lifted the window inch by inch, turned, lowered his legs inside the Gold Room—strained for sounds of any nature, and dropped to the floor, where he stood in an attitude of a Greek runner on tiptoes.

He discerned, with super-sight, polished rows of glass cases, dull and crusted gold—a yellow idol—ceramics—diamonds and many ropes of small pearls. Crowning a case, filled with jade, stood—the Urn.

There came as he reached and lifted down the prize, a sound outside a steel shutter, and the shuffling feet of a passing guard.

Then the sound was gone—echo by echo.

Fay held out the precious Urn. It was heavy, scrolled with figures winding from top to bottom—and, in one place, he saw a lowing heifer being led to a pagan sacrifice.

Opening his coat, he snuggled the Urn under his arm and succeeded in buttoning the lowermost button. He crossed the Gold Room, climbed to the sill, pulled down the window to its former position, and looked upward.

Hawes' glinting eyes were over the edge of the air-shaft. Above the collector shone the cold stars. Fay motioned to steady the ladder, and swung until he dangled in the sheer. He went up, hand upon hand, paused when he reached the first steel bar, hooked a knee through the ladder, waited, listened, and gained his breath, before he completed the climb and stood where Hawes' fawning breath was on his face.

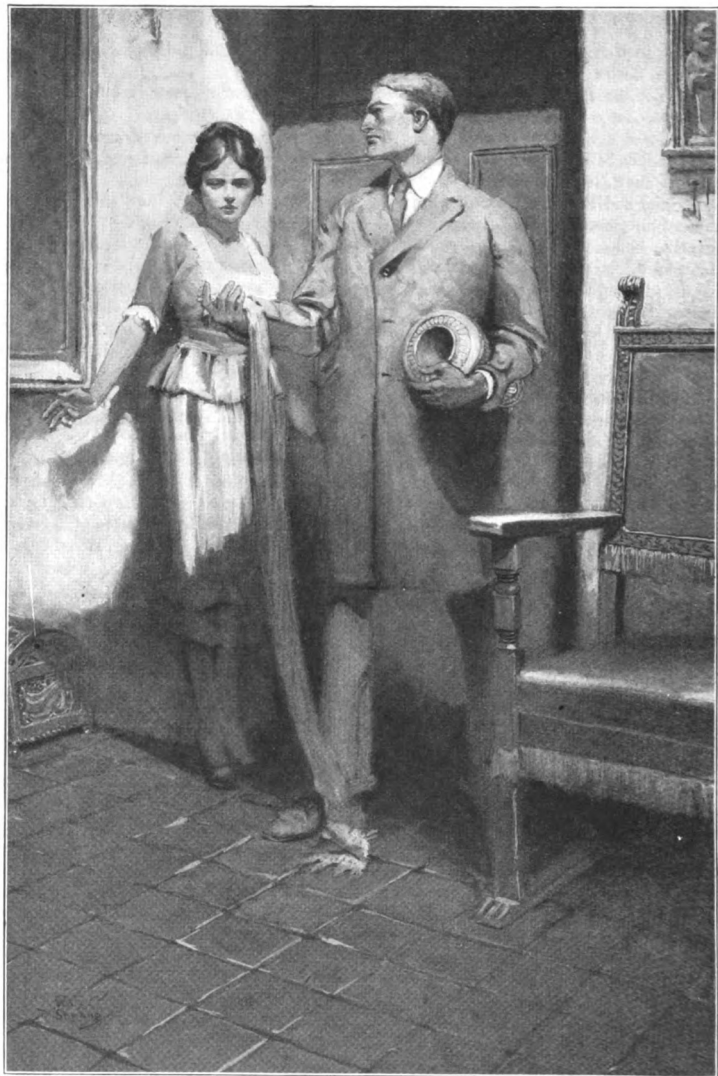
"Here's your Urn," said Fay.

"Look out—you'll break it! Oh, my beauty!"

Fay attended to pulling up the ladder while Hawes examined the Urn.

The collector followed Fay across the roof.

"One thousand dollars!" said Fay.



"It isn't often I get paid twice for one job!"

Hawes clutched the Urn.

"Wait till we get to the house. I didn't bring the money along."

Fay eyed his collodium-tipped fingers. "All right!

"We'll wait till we reach your house, Hawes!"

The descent from the cornice to the ground was made by Hawes after a performance of quaking and slipping. Fay unhooked the ladder, let it drop, went over the edge, found the first projection on the water-spout, an iron hook, and climbed down with the agility of a young sailor.

The old receiver started away from the museum.

Fay then gathered up the rope-ladder, wound it around his waist, and trailed the collector's shadowy and surprisingly agile form to the first street and arc lamp:

"Don't you come too close!" exclaimed Hawes. "Stay behind and see if anybody is following us. Stay behind—"

Fay marked the bulge under the collector's coat where the Grecian Urn was secreted.

Through avenues they walked until there shone ahead the lights of Delphia Street.

No detective or patrolman stood near No. 9.

Fay then caught up with Hawes and went with him through the gate, up the steps, and into the hall, after Oenone had answered repeated jabs upon the door-button.

"Where's my thousand dollars?" said Fay.

Hawes unbuttoned his coat and held the Urn in the glow that came from a hall-lamp.

"Quick, with the money!" Fay persisted.

"To be sure," said Hawes. "Oenone, go to my desk and get this man the money. It's in the top drawer with the jewel cases."

Oenone returned with both hands filled with bills.

She fairly thrust them at her father, and turned her head away. Fay saw the resentment in her eyes.

He unwound the rope-ladder from his waist while Hawes counted the bills twice, folded them, studied the Urn, then held out his talons.

"Another thousand—all new money! All yours—young man!"

Fay took the bills and fastened upon Hawes a glance so startling that the collector asked:

"What is it?"

"Why, where's your muffler? Didn't you bring it home with you?"

The collector gripped the Urn with one hand and reached with the other for his throat.

"God, no! You had it!"

Senile cackling came from Hawes's lips.

He swayed and his knees shook. The Urn was in danger of falling. Oenone took it away from her father. Hawes' slouch-hat fell off, revealing a bald pate, narrow at the temples, all wrinkled like the skin of a dried drum.

"My muffler," he shrieked.

"Yes, your muffler."

"Where is it?"

"It had your initials embroidered on one end, Hawes."

"God, yes!"

"And it will convict you if it is found!"

"Yes! Yes!"

"I forgot to tell you, Hawes. I lost it down the air-shaft."

"You lie!"

FAY went to the door, opened it, felt the cutting air, wheeled, and reached both hands expressively forward, then said, drily:

"You gave me two thousand for getting that Urn, Hawes.

"And I want four thousand—for putting it back. . . .

"You see it has got to go back," continued Fay. "The muffler—with your initials, remember, is probably at the bottom of the shaft at the Museum. If the

Urn is missing you will be accused of the theft.

"If the Urn is replaced you stand a chance—"

But Hawes was ready to grasp at a straw, and he ventured the suggestion:

"But you can get the muffler, can't you?"

"Your ladder isn't half long enough to reach to it.

"Not only that, but a guard has probably picked up the muffler by this time. They won't suspect you—unless they learn that the Urn—Keats's Urn is gone. The thing to do is to get it back, and that quickly."

Hawes spat out:

"Damn you!"

"Just so," said Fay. "You spoke of knowing the curator—he will be sure to know your muffler."

Fay poised on tiptoes and swung his head suggestively.

"Don't go!" cried Oenone. "Oh, father, don't let him go. He must take the Urn back."

"What do you say, Hawes?"

Hawes did not hesitate:

"I'll kill you!"

"No you won't. You'll pay me for taking back the Urn. Two thousand for getting it—four thousand for replacing it."

Fay stepped slowly toward the rope-ladder.

"Four thousand," he said.

Hawes sank down on the first step.

"Oenone—"

He breathed huskily.

"My drawer in the library—get the money—I haven't four thousand dollars!"

After a moment, he added:

"And Oenone, bring jewels—one or two small ones."

The girl gave the Urn to Fay, hurried through the hall, and ran back with a collection of bills. She added to these a set of not over-large gems, and a pearl on a silver pendant.

Fay appraised them. Hawes whimpered:

"How do I know you will replace the Urn?"

"How can I be sure of that?"

"On my word of honor!"

Hawes laughed.

"Honor? . . . From a thief?" he replied.

"Yes!"

Fay placed the Urn and ladder under his coat.

"You will take back Keats's Urn?" asked Oenone.

Fay looked deep into her eyes as he spoke:

"Yes!"

"And save my father?"

The cracksman bowed.

Hawes watched Fay—made as if to rise from the stair, and then utterly collapsed.

"You've fooled me!"

"How so?"

HAWES clutched at his throat. Fay motioned for Oenone to come through the door with him.

"I have something to show you," he whispered.

"See?"

He thrust two slender fingers into the Urn and pulled out Hawes's muffler.

"I'll put the urn back," he said, "and keep the muffler for a souvenir.

"It isn't often I get paid twice for one job."

His third reward was in Oenone's smiling eyes.



"He glanced at the face, and
was aware that it was one of
some beauty."

OTHER MEN'S WIVES

*Concluding a Two-Part Story of Adventure
and Romance in East Africa*

By S. Gordon Gurwit

Illustrations by Elmer Young

[The story thus far: Major Allen Stanhope, of the British Army, arrives at Mombasa from the interior, only to be confronted after a lapse of years by General Throckmorton's daughter, Alice, who had jilted him, but who finds herself now possessed of a genuine love for him. Stanhope, however, falls in love with Avis Talmidge, daughter of an American missionary, bound for work among the natives. To her he proposes, only to be told that she is already affianced—to a young man at home. Stanhope's grief finds timely relief, a few days after Avis and her father leave, in a call to the interior to observe signs of unrest among the native tribes. Part two starts here:]

STANHOPE rode in silence, a little in advance of the others, his horse picking the way carefully over the rough game trail.

At their back, in the distance, lay the Mau Escarpment. In the middle distance

hung the mirage, while, beyond, the bold hills rose like mountains from a lake. It was just noon, and the heat waves quivered above the brown African plains.

Benson and Williams rode a bit behind Stanhope, and then came the servants and

the few native soldiers. It was a small *sefari* of ten people, all mounted, traveling lightly, as distance was to be covered quickly.

At Kajabi there had been no fresh news—just vague rumors—so Stanhope determined to make the journey with his man Ahmed. The others would leave him at Butonga and continue on their way.

Benson was humming scraps of song and smoking cigarettes; occasionally, he burst into vivid abuse of the Sotik country. Williams answered infrequently, but mainly rode in moist, uncomfortable silence, for he was somewhat fleshy.

"How long before we get to the mission?" called Benson to Stanhope, who rode stoically in front.

"Few hours," replied Stanhope, without turning. "Unless we meet Masai."

Benson muttered something deep in his throat and fingered the heavy service automatic that hung from his belt. He turned in his saddle and surveyed the native soldiers. He didn't quite trust them. After all, they were natives. He faced forward again.

"Damned hot," he observed to Williams.

Williams murmured an acquiescence.

Stanhope contributed very little to the conversation. His eyes were busy and searched the plains constantly. Although there was nothing definite, he was uneasy with the disquieting rumors. There was a tale of a raid on a frontier settler, of numerous cattle stolen. But it was rumor; no positive intelligence had come from the wild back country. He determined to push on swiftly and bring Avis, her father and the other whites to Kajabi. A silent prayer lay in his heart that no harm might come to her. Happiness and despair tugged at his heart-strings at the thought of seeing her again soon: happiness because an avid hunger would be appeased at sight of her beloved features; despair, because she belonged to another. He covered his weary headache with a brave nonchalance, a

studied imperturbability, so that none could have guessed that this calm, clear-eyed man hid a grievous hurt.

A LOW EXCLAMATION drew his attention to his servant, Ahmed, who had suddenly pushed to his side.

"See, Baas!" he exclaimed, pointing to a huge euphorbia tree.

A few rhino tick-birds were clamoring in the grass ahead. The entire party stopped. Directly in their trail a huge rhinoceros rose from where it had been resting near the tree. Evidently it had not as yet scented them, for it turned uncertainly from side to side. Benson leveled his heavy rifle.

"Don't shoot!" warned Stanhope, "unless it becomes absolutely necessary—I'll tell you when. Keep quiet!"

The big beast, which was about eighty yards distant, trotted around in a circle, grunting, suspicious, its little, pig-like eyes unable to make out any danger. Finally it trotted off to the east.

Again the party moved forward, Ahmed taking his place in the rear.

"Lucky that native of yours saw the beast," said Benson, glancing about. "I'd as soon be charged by an armored tank!"

"It is not advisable to do any shooting now, anyway," said Williams. "We're in Masai country, and if there's any truth to those rumors, I don't want to attract any attention to myself. It may be all tosh, but—"

He left the sentence unfinished.

Benson eyed the bolt of his rifle speculatively, laughed, and fell to humming a song.

The trail turned slowly toward a rocky mound of hills. Here and there the plains were dotted with dark acacias and wizened thorn. A herd of zebras watched them for a moment from a safe distance, then galloped away. Slowly they went forward, until the trail sloped sharply downward between two rocky hills. Gradually the hills came nearer, and finally they made out the mission buildings, standing in a grove of flat-topped acacias

at the foot of a low hill. A little stream ran to one side of the house and raced away to the south. To the left stretched the plains, torrid, hazy with here and there a huge fig or euphorbia tree.

Through his glasses, Stanhope made out the cattle herds and the Masai kraals that occupied the banks of the little river a mile or more down stream. The glasses showed no sign of human activity at the mission.

"Do you imagine those black devils have been there already?" growled Benson, pointing to the mission and lowering his glasses.

Stanhope's heart was racing with an unnamed dread. Could it be that the Masai had attacked the mission? The thought of Avis in the hands of war-mad, lust-drunk natives was poignant torture. It frightened him—a new sensation for him.

"We'll soon find out," he answered grimly. "Ride behind me, single file; we'll follow that line of trees and we can get into the mission without being seen from the kraals. God help the Masai if one hair of a white head has been harmed here!"

They rode cautiously forward, and soon were in the house. The mission seemed to be deserted. They went swiftly, fearfully, from room to room, expecting momentarily to find the tragedy of the wilderness, but there was not a soul in the house. Upon the rifle rack, Stanhope at length found a note.

As he read it, the others watched him eagerly, apprehensively.

"Well?" demanded Benson.

"Seems all right," smiled Stanhope, passing him the note.

A vast relief came upon him.

"The blacks broke out last night and threatened the house, but did no actual damage. Thornton recognized several of our white friends, who seemed to be leading and egging on the natives. He waited until morning, then took all the whites and cleared out—says he's striking 'cross country to Kajabi. Thank God they're

safe! I don't believe there will be any actual trouble, but I'm glad the white women are gone. I'll stay and have a talk with the chief in the morning."

Williams shook his head.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," he said.

"Good thing Thornton cleared out," said Benson. "If those black devils do break loose, they'll be a handful. Better not stay alone, Major."

"There's no danger," said Stanhope. "Best for me to nip this in the bud while I'm here. I know the chief well."

AHMED was busy taking possession and preparing a meal for the white men; the native soldiers were preparing their rice, while the other servants looked after the horses. So far, no sound had come to them from the distant native kraals.

Benson and Williams sat and smoked after the meal, while the servants and soldiers patiently waited the will of the white masters. Stanhope was looking out of the window toward the kraals. All seemed quiet there. It was too far away for the Masai to have discovered their presence in the mission, as many clumps of trees intervened between the two points. They had made very little sound in entering.

He was greatly relieved to know that Avis, her father and the other few whites were on their way to safety; yet a dull ache burned in his heart because he had not seen Avis again. Perhaps it was best so, after all, he wearily reflected. Why torture himself with a glimpse of a paradise he could never attain. It was all so utterly hopeless.

"All quiet," he said, at length, turning to the others. "You chaps can move on to M'guzo Nyanza, and I'll look around here a bit. I've ordered the Queen's Rifles here in four days anyway, so I'll be all right."

Benson arose, grumbling, and joined him at the window. He looked across the burning plains and grunted.

"I don't like to do it," he announced,

turning. "It's not right to leave you here alone with Ahmed—one white man amongst hundreds of these mad dogs."

He waved his arm to indicate the native kraals down stream.

"They're going to break loose, I tell you—I can feel it in my bones! It's in the air!"

Stanhope laughed. "Believe I'll clean up a bit," he announced, looking at his hands. "You're imagining things, Benson. There's nothing to be apprehensive about. You see they threatened the mission this morning, but they feared to do any actual damage."

He walked out. Williams watched him go with weary eyes.

"Damned outrage," he murmured, "but what can we do? Orders are orders."

"Orders be damned!" returned Benson. "If he's bound to stay, we ought to stay with him. We can't leave him—it's murder! You remember what happened when the Kikuyu dogs went wild."

"Um-m-m!" irrelevantly answered Williams.

"What'll we do?" continued Benson.

"Nothing, old man," wearily. "What can we do? We have no choice in the matter. We're due at M'guzo Nyanza and—orders are orders."

"But it's tempting fate to leave him!" Benson was exasperated.

Williams smiled. "Forget it," he said. "He's stronger than both of us—all of us." He eyed his cigarette. "You know he's up for the D. S. O., and you remember the story of the Wanderobo uprising in the Lado. He's amply able to take care of himself."

Benson nodded. "I understand the General has faith in him. If half the stories they tell of him are true—"

"They are!" said Williams.

Both men sat in silence until Stanhope returned, then, as the sun was going down, the party made ready to go.

"You're going to have good weather tonight," said Stanhope, standing at the door watching them get ready. "You'll make it easy in three days."

Benson nodded. He was uneasy.

"I hate to go," he grumbled to Williams.

"He wouldn't let you stay," answered the stout man. "Told me he always preferred to work alone. Stop singing a swan song, will you, Jim? You make me nervous! Don't butt in; he won't thank you. If you offered to stay, he'd become your superior officer and order you out. Turn your boys along that line of thorn trees, Jim. We'll be out of sight of the Masai kraals by the time we top that rise."

"I'm going to report it just the same," grumbled Benson. "Damned outrage! If he's trying to get himself killed I'm not going to stand by and see him cut down! I'll send a runner to Kajabi and have them send down some—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," interjected Williams quietly. "The best thing for you to do is to forget it. He'd resent it if you butted in."

STANHOPE watched them out of sight, then went back into the mission. The sun was low in the west, and it was growing cooler. Presently, from the Masai kraals, where all had been silence before, came the dim beating of tom-toms. The air had grown still. Stanhope smiled and bolted the doors. Probably a war dance. Well, let them dance. He had no fear of an attack. He had nothing to lose if he was attacked, except his life, and that wasn't of any value, apparently, to anyone, including himself. His eyes strayed to the well filled gun rack. He went to the window and looked out, using his glasses. A dim form skulked past near the river edge, and he heard the coughing grunt of a questing lion.

The beating of the tom-toms grew louder, then died away. He concluded not to light any lamps. It might incite the natives to acts at night that they would not dream of doing in the daytime. The old, familiar thrill of danger, always sweet to him, gripped him again. He

began to whistle softly, as he sat by the window and cleaned his rifles in the waning light.

Ahmed was arranging a bed for him, and laying out some clean clothes.

"Baas," he said, and smiled.

"I'll change in the morning," said Stanhope. "Look around, Ahmed, and see that the windows are barred. It won't hurt to take precautions. Then, look after the horses. We'll camp in this room and close up the rest of the house."

"It is an order!"

Again Stanhope crossed to the window. With his glasses he could make out faint fires down the river. Suddenly he heard distinct shots. His trained faculties told him that there were two kinds: the heavy booming of black powder—those were the old-fashioned natives' guns—and the crack of smokeless, high-powered ammunition.

Stanhope's lip curled. "Some of those outcast Germans," he muttered. "Regular little holiday, I suppose, with their Masai friends—dancing, feasting and firing guns in the air."

The firing continued for some time, then abruptly stopped; and again the silence of the African veldt predominated.

Stanhope shook himself and carefully shielded the light that set his pipe going. For an hour or more he went about the place, satisfying himself regarding locks and bolts, then he went back to his bedroom and sat smoking.

And as the needle in a compass swings unerringly to the north, so his thoughts winged to Avis. He had grown quite content with his fate. He had become satisfied to live his life in Africa in the pleasant, care-free manner of the service; he had set a seal on the far off days of his disillusioned youth, and had grown to forget that they had ever existed.

The sight of Alice Throckmorton had only served to content him further with his present mode of life, his philosophy, his independence.

Then Avis had come, and in one short week had undone all the work of years

and shattered the serenity which had cost him such weary self-contest to attain. He had sworn to shun white women as one would a plague, and Avis had come to unman his resolve, to disturb and shadow his hard-won peace; to wring his pride, to waken old wounds again with the same bitter mirage of happiness.

Why was he fated to love a woman who belonged to another? Twice in his life the same thing had occurred. Was he fated to find happiness but a phantom? His face grew bloodless as he thought what love from Avis would mean, the passion of her kisses, the wonder of her subjugation. He sat mute, staring out into the cavern of the African night.

It was not his nature to allow himself the emasculating indulgence of regret, so he flung it off with an angry impatience.

SUDDENLY a cry came to his ears—a scream—and startled him out of his tense introspection.

"God!" he muttered, springing to his feet. "Am I dreaming? Was that a white woman's scream?"

He listened intently, but no sound came to him. He relaxed, smiling ruefully. He had been so deeply wrapped in thought that he doubted his own ears.

"A little too much sun," he told himself. "I'm imagining things. Yet, I could have sworn—" He bit his lip. "Imagination! What would a white woman be doing here—on the plains?"

He sat on the edge of his bed and continued to smoke. The room was now quite dark, as no light was burning, and the moon had not as yet come up. An hour, two hours, went by. The tom-toms were audible again. Somewhere out on the dim veldt there was a sound that irritated him; a moaning murmur. He listened intently.

"Hyenas," he muttered. Then it came again, a low moaning. His eyes narrowed. His right hand fastened upon the handle of his heavy Browning. Slowly he rose to his feet and tip-toed to the open,

barred window. Again it came: sobs, moans, faint and heart-breaking.

Stanhope cautiously opened the door and stepped out into the night. Every muscle and sense now alert, he paused to locate the sounds; then, with infinite caution, the Browning in his right hand, he stole like a shadow toward a group of thorn trees near the river bank.

CHAPTER VII

A FEW minutes later, bearing his burden, he kicked the door wide open. "Ahmed!" he called. From the far side of the house, where the horses were tied, a murmur answered him.

"Ahmed!" he shouted again. "Quick! A light!"

He picked his way carefully in the darkness to his bed, and there deposited his burden. A shadowy figure suddenly loomed in the doorway.

"Baas?" questioned Ahmed.

"A light, quick!" commanded Stanhope.

The low moaning continued from the sufferer on the bed, and an exclamation escaped Ahmed.

"But they will see," he whispered; "the Masai—"

"We'll chance that!" Stanhope cut him short. "A light—and close and bar all the windows."

In the flickering, weak light of the oil lamp, Ahmed knelt by the bedside.

"Baas!" he exclaimed. "It is a white woman!"

"Yes, a white woman," repeated Stanhope, bewildered. "Where, in God's name, could she have come from?"

Ahmed, everything forgotten, was bending over the body. There was blood on her face, throat and shoulder; her arms were scratched and bleeding; her clothes were torn, bloody and dirty. Swiftly the Arab ran his fingers over every bone and joint.

"No bones are broken, Baas," he said, at length, and continued his examination rapidly.

Stanhope silently watched the intelli-

gent searching of Ahmed's supple fingers. He glanced at the face, and was aware that it was one of some beauty, despite the blood clots and the ragged scratches. He was utterly bewildered. Where had she come from? Who was she? It was a strange place to find a young white girl—alone on the African veldt at night, apparently a victim of the savage Masai. How had she escaped? A thousand questions and possible answers winged through his mind with startling rapidity.

Ahmed turned, his face distorted with a peculiar expression, his eyes searching his master's.

"Baas," he whispered, "there is a wound in her back and her shoulder."

"What!" exclaimed Stanhope, aghast. "Are they bad, Ahmed?"

The Arab nodded.

"The large one in the back—a Masai spear."

A cold hand clutched at Stanhope's heart. He was stiff with horror.

"The white ma'am will die," continued Ahmed. "I do not know what to do, Baas; I have not enough skill for bad wounds."

"For Heaven's sake!" said Stanhope, "do the best you can! You have some skill—use it! I'll help you as much as I can. Tell me what to do."

THE ARAB turned the girl over, exposing part of her wound. Stanhope suddenly turned, sickened, and examined the windows, leaving Ahmed to do what he could. At that moment he was helpless to give any aid. Ahmed had a crude medical skill, picked up no one knows where or how, and Stanhope was thankful for it now.

"The medicine box and water, Baas," called Ahmed.

Stanhope quickly brought the emergency kit, a pail of water, and seeing how grave the situation was, arranged the lamp so that it had the least chance of being seen by anyone on the outside. He grimly resolved to give the Masai a warm reception if they came.

It was a long night of horror to both of them. They worked as if possessed to cleanse the girl's wounds, to prevent poisoning, trying to be as gentle as possible in order to spare the already overburdened sufferer. Stanhope's heart melted at the girl's low moaning. Then, the delirium and fever of serious wounds came, and his hands clenched with wrath when the girl's piercing screams broke out. Ahmed worked like a demon, administering to the tortured woman, Stanhope for once obeying his servant without question.

There was no disturbance from the Masai during the night. No sign, no sound. Once, toward morning, they heard several lions roar grandly. The sounds seemed quite near.

Ahmed lifted his weary eyes to his master.

"Simba has had a feast, Baas," he whispered. "He only roars like that when he is full fed."

Stanhope nodded.

The dawn finally came. Stanhope ventured to open the windows and swiftly reconnoitred. Evidently the savages were still asleep. No sound came from their camp. When he returned, Ahmed had bathed the girl's face and throat and had given her temporary relief by the aid of drugs from the medicine kit. She slept quietly.

"The worst is over, Baas," said Ahmed. "The girl will live."

Then the indefatigable Arab began to arrange the disordered room.

"The Masai, Baas?" he questioned.

"No sign yet, Ahmed," replied Stanhope wearily, then: "Ahmed."

"Baas!"

"It can be no other way, Ahmed. There can be no rest today."

The Arab nodded understandingly.

"The soldiers at Wakamba?"

"Yes, and swiftly!"

"Ahmed will be there before the sun is overhead!"

"Take my horse," directed Stanhope. "Only the swiftest will do. Make haste,

but use caution. I shall be here, waiting."

In an incredibly short time Ahmed had made some food ready for both of them, had instructed Stanhope what to do with the unconscious sufferer, had saddled his horse, and was gone.

Then began a morning of torture for Stanhope. He was fearful of an attack by the Masai now, because of this wounded girl, thrust so unexpectedly under his protection. He made countless trips out of the house to reconnoitre; he laid his rifles and pistol, with ammunition for both, near to hand, and waited. It was out of the question to try and move the girl. To attempt to do so, with her dangerous wound in the back, would mean her death. There was only one thing to do: hold the mission at any cost, in case of an attack, until the soldiers came.

The girl, drugged, slept peacefully, and for this he was very thankful. His eyes were anguished, but he fought sleep with a dogged persistence that conquered, but left him with dark circles under his eyes. He dared not sleep—even for a minute.

He walked over to the bed and watched the girl for a minute. Under Ahmed's tender care, she hardly seemed the same woman. Her hair was combed and simply pinned at the back of her head; there were no more blood stains, but the blue bruises on the fair skin caused a muffled exclamation to come to his lips.

"The dogs!" he grated.

There was no denying the girl's charm. Her features had an indescribable patrician delicacy, crowned by a glory of spun gold. She was very young, that was evident. As she slept calmly under the influence of the drug, she seemed hardly more than a child.

THE MYSTERY of her presence confounded Stanhope. He knew she did not belong to any mission, as there was only one within hundreds of miles, and that was the one they were in; there were

no settlers within many miles, so it was doubtful if she was a daughter of some frontier dweller. While he stood watching her and speculating as to her identity, the girl suddenly opened her eyes and looked directly into his. They were big, blue eyes, blue as Parma violets. There was no surprise or question in her regard. Stanhope flushed under the unexpected, calm scrutiny.

"Please be very quiet," he said, in a low voice. "You have been very sick, and you are hurt. But you are all right now—if you'll be quiet and rest—and I—ah—we'll take good care of you."

She turned to look at him more directly, still the wide-eyed look of a child, then she smiled slightly.

"Is there anything you want?" continued Stanhope, ill at ease. "I'll get it for you—water—tea? Would you like to have me get in touch with your relatives?"

She still smiled, watching him with calm eyes.

"Water," she said, faintly.

He wheeled instantly on his errand. Her calm, untroubled eyes and the faint smile worried him. Perhaps it was the drug; perhaps when the effects wore off she would be able to give him some explanation that would account for her plight and her presence.

When he returned with the water, she was sleeping again, as her deep, regular breathing attested. He moistened a fresh handkerchief with water and put it on her head, and made himself a hurried meal. Then he sat watching her, his ears intent for any sound outside that might threaten them.

Toward noon, she opened her eyes again and regarded him.

"I'm sick," she said, in a weak voice.

Stanhope's heart leaped with despair. He felt utterly helpless.

"There!" he exclaimed. "Just keep quiet. You'll be all right. Is there anything I can get for you? Anything you want? Water?"

Big tears collected in her eyes and

rolled down her cheeks. After a moment, she smiled again.

"Who are you?" she questioned, weakly.

"Allen Stanhope," he smiled. "Would you mind telling me who you are?"

She regarded him with the same blank smile, but made no answer; then the weary lids dropped again and she slept.

Stanhope watched her for a moment, motionless; then, seeing that she was evidently resting quietly, he made his way to the window. A faint sound had caught his attention: hollow, dim, monotonous. Tom-toms! They were at it again. He stepped to his rifles and looked them over. He tried several before loading them, and the clicking of the bolts woke the girl.

She smiled at him again, faintly, and he smiled to her. Evidently, the gun he held meant nothing to her. After a moment or two, she closed her eyes again.

He stole softly from window to window, but saw no signs of natives. Returning to the bedside, he glanced at the girl. She was asleep.

Again he fell to speculating as to her identity. Could she be the daughter of some frontier settler who had been on *sefari*? Her clothes had given no clue; there was nothing about her to even suggest her identity.

A faint sound caused him instantly to whip around. There, at the window in back of him, were two figures. One he recognized as a German soldier of fortune, with a long history as an ivory poacher and a price on his head; the other a tall, stately Masai warrior, stark naked, carrying his huge spear and oval ox-hide shield. In an instant, both were gone.

A SHARP EXCLAMATION broke from Stanhope's lips. It was only a matter of time now. The German's startled look had told him that he had been recognized, and he knew that the German outlaws considered him too dangerous to let him get away, when there seemed to

be now such a wonderful opportunity for them to settle old accounts. There were no soldiers about, and they would undoubtedly take advantage of his being alone. With a vicious grumble, he swept up a heavy, double elephant rifle and stepped outside.

He had a momentary view of the German's helmet, as he ran between some low thorn trees, but it was enough. The ear-splitting crack of the heavy express was followed by an audible "smack"; it spelled the last of the outlaw. The Masai dodged behind the trunk of an acacia tree. Stanhope smiled. The moment he came out of its shelter would be his last.

Another thought struck him as he waited for the black to reappear: the shot would be heard in the Masai kraals, and soon would come an investigation if the two scouts failed to return. He walked slowly toward the tree, the safety off the big rifle, ready to use it instantly. In the Masai tongue he called to the warrior to come out.

"You know me," he called. "I am your friend, B'wana M'wade. You know my way. I shall not harm you. You must go back to the kraal and tell the chief that B'wana M'wade is here and must not be disturbed—or simba shall feast this night on many of your people. Tell him he must not listen to the whites in his camp. They are hyenas who will betray you. Even now the soldiers are near, and if he would save his cattle and crops, he must make no sign against the mission here. The English are your friends. Heed well what I have said. It is the truth. I have spoken."

The big Masai looked cautiously around the bole of the tree.

"B'wana M'wade!" he exclaimed; then he stepped from behind the tree.

Stanhope was well known among the Masai as a mighty hunter and a friend of the Masai tribes. Now he knew that he must play his all upon his reputation as a mighty warrior and a just man.

"Yes," he replied, "B'wana M'wade. I

do not harm you, for you are my friend. Go in peace. All Masai are my friends, as are the Nandi. Return to your chief and say that B'wana M'wade says it. The white stealers of ivory in your camp he will kill if they do not run away to the great forests. The mission here of the God man must not be disturbed. I have spoken."

The tall warrior sped away, and Stanhope walked back to the house, glancing once at the prone figure of the outlaw, broken by the big, soft-nose bullet. He picked up the outlaw's arms and ammunition, and took them with him. He had no compunction for the dead man, for he had been instrumental in instigating many raids upon helpless frontier missions and settlers, and there were tales of horror connected with his treatment of captured white women that called for vengeance.

STANHOPE did not deceive himself. He knew it was only a question of time now. He doubted that he could suspend an attack by revealing his identity to his former friends and trail companions. The white adventurers in their camp would soon dispell any fear of him in the natives' minds. They, also, were white "B'wanas" to the child-like Masai of this far frontier.

He entered the mission softly, and barred the door. The girl was still sleeping.

No sound of tom-toms came to him now. They had ceased when he had fired the shot. He smiled grimly. The runner would soon arrive and tell them what had happened. He could imagine the rage of the white adventurers at the death of their companion. They were desperate men. He knew them well; petty officers of the German forces who had escaped into the bush after the war, and now made a living by desperate measures. Each had a price upon his head. To further their own safety, they had encouraged several tribes to turn ugly, and in this far wilderness, guarded by natives

unfriendly to the British, they felt comparatively safe.

The girl moaned, and he eased her position slightly, and also gave her a little water to drink. She went back to her sleep without opening her eyes.

Slowly the sun sank, and a red-hot after glow tinted the sky; the intense heat of the day began to wane. He made a hasty meal, smoked his pipe for a moment near a window; then he took his glasses and searched the plains, but no human sign rewarded him.

A far sound suddenly arrested him. The muscles of his jaw tensed. Again came the faint monotone of the tom-toms. That meant that the war-dance was on again; that he had lost. Probably they would attack tonight. He began to whistle softly. Where was Ahmed? Where were the Queen's Rifles? Had Ahmed reached them with his call for help, or had Ahmed been stopped? He caught his breath. If help did not come, it was all over. He could account for some, but eventually—

He watched the girl as she slept. A grim smile swept his lean features. She would never fall into their hands, that much was certain.

Darkness crept over the sky and the sun sank behind the hills. Through the hazy dusk, far sounds came to him, again and again.

"Shots!" he muttered. He came to his feet. Again came the shots, faint, far away, scarcely audible; then, silence.

"The soldiers or Ahmed, he told himself. "Pray God it's both."

"Then," he reflected, "the soldiers could not have moved so swiftly. Who could it have been?"

The girl's helplessness tied him to the house hand and foot. It was nerve breaking to have to sit quietly by and do nothing. He listened, but no further shots sounded. Tense, conjecturing, every nerve taut with suspense, he sat and waited.

An hour went by. It was dark now, and the plains were the playground of the

great carnivora. Stanhope had lighted no lamp, but sat smoking and listening to the noises of the African night. Around the house, in the trees somewhere, a cuckoo called in a queer gurgle; a chattering of disturbed colobus monkeys followed as they settled for the night; from far up the river came the moan of a lion.

A suspicious scratching galvanized him into instant action. There was something at the east window, tugging at the shutter. He crept to the window. Against the sky line, he made out the dim figure of a man.

CHAPTER VIII

A MOMENT LATER he admitted Ahmed, spent and weary, caked with dirt and dust, an ugly cut on his forehead where the blood had scarce ceased to flow.

"They come, Baas," he gasped painfully, "as soon as the soldiers come from Topoji. I found but one white captain at the station. Tonight they start—maybe have already started. I would not wait, so I came at once. Those black devils shot me at the kongoni water hole—"

He stopped, swaying suddenly.

Stanhope caught him in his arms, and Ahmed straightened again.

"It is nothing, Baas," he whispered. "Just a moment's weakness. The Firefly is dead."

A vivid oath came from Stanhope's lips suddenly. "They shot her?" he questioned in a low, fierce tone.

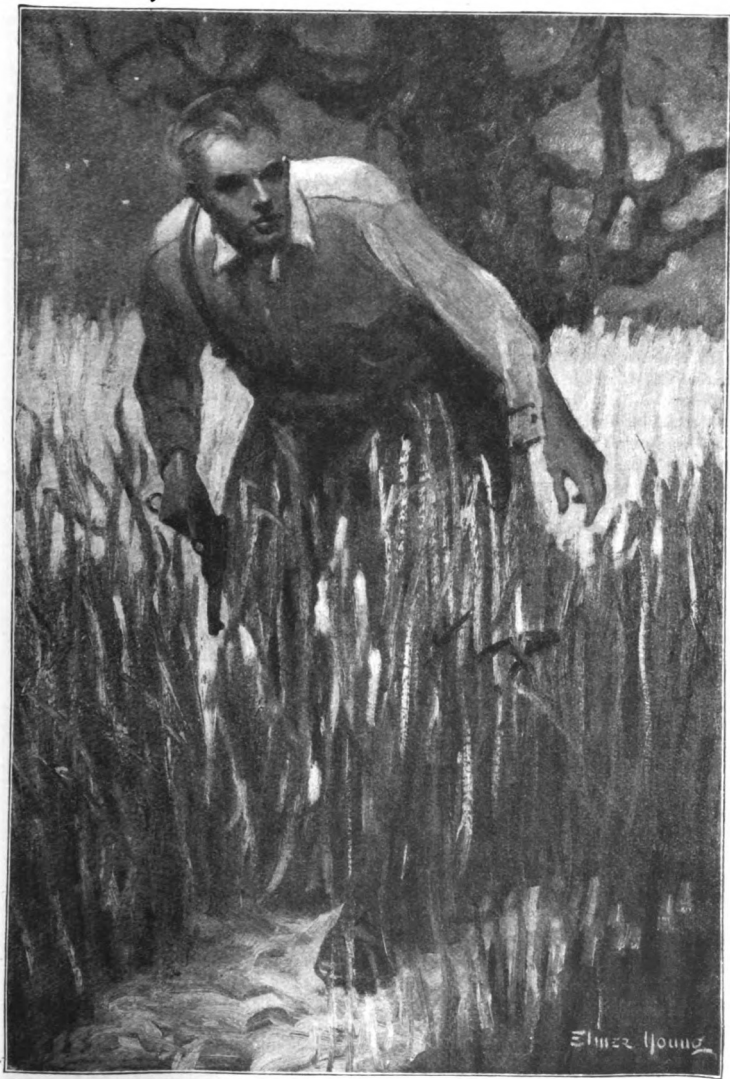
Ahmed nodded.

"A broken leg. She could not go. I stopped to—put her out of pain, and they saw me." Ahmed pointed to his head. "Two Masai I shot, Baas."

Stanhope laid his hand upon the Arab's shoulder.

"You did well, Ahmed," he said gently. "Perhaps we can hold out until the soldiers come. There has been no sign yet, but I suppose they'll come now—since you shot two of their men."

"They are all about, Baas," said Ah-



"Crouching, he went forward to the left to skirt the hill."

med. "They wait for the soldiers to pass, Baas, near the pass in the hills—the one by the *donga*. That is where I was shot. Unless the soldiers are warned, Baas—"

Ahmed left the significant sentence unfinished.

Stanhope turned away, enraged at his helplessness. What was there to do? What could he do? How leave the girl to warn the soldiers of the ambush?

"I met a Kiyirondo, from whom I begged water," Ahmed was speaking again, "and he told me something of the woman here."

His eyes strayed to the bed. Stanhope whirled.

"Tell me," he said, tersely.

"Her name is Ben-Ali Batouche—the Baas has heard?"

"Something. Go on!"

"She is of America. She saw him in Kimberly. She loved him and married him. They went to live by the Albert N'yanza, near the great forest. Ben-Ali was a dealer in the bright stones. The Baas knows?"

"I know of him—an illicit diamond buyer and trader. There was a price on his head. Is that all?"

"He was an Arab, a native of Entebbe," continued Ahmed. "A fine man, Baas, handsome as the rising sun, and tall and straight as the palms of the north. Many women loved him. He was young and he laughed. He knew no law. The Baas knows?"

Stanhope nodded.

"He came with many of the bright stones from the Albert N'yanza to bring to Mombasa under cover of night. The white outlaws knew. They fell upon his *sefari*, and none escaped the Masai but the Kivirondo, who told me all. He was of the *sefari*. The girl, too, escaped when her husband fell. The bright stones were stolen. The Kivirondo saw it all. Ben-Ali fought well, but there were too many. The white outlaws took the stones from the wagon of Batouche after they shot him. The girl ran into the bush when he fell." Ahmed stopped for a moment. "It

must be near here that they fell—to the south—ah!" A sudden exclamation escaped him. "The Baas remembers? We heard simba roaring nearby? And the hyenas? They had feasted!"

For several moments there was silence. Ahmed drank great quantities of water, then went to the bedside.

"She is better?" he asked.

"She has lost her knowledge," replied Stanhope.

"She is like a little child. She breathes and looks, but knows nothing."

THEY both looked at the little figure in despair. Helpless, hurt, her husband and his entire *sefari* wiped out by the Masai, it became Stanhope's duty to care for her. This he resolved to do, to the best of his ability, until he could give her into the proper hands on the coast. In the meanwhile, what should he do about warning the soldiers? Could he leave her with Ahmed? He suddenly resolved that he must do just that, as he couldn't send Ahmed out again. Ahmed had not slept or eaten, and was wounded in the bargain.

"Ahmed," said Stanhope finally, turning to the Arab and laying a friendly hand on his shoulder, "I will ride to meet the soldiers; they must be warned. You will stay with the girl. You can care for her better than I. I will take your horse. . . . No! I will go! You have done your share. I ride tonight."

"It is written," responded the Arab gravely.

"If I do not return, you must take care of her as you would of me."

"It is an order," responded the Arab, who loved him.

"And—" Stanhope hesitated—"there are rifles. You know better than most how to use them. If they press you so hard that the hour comes—" he paused and nodded his head significantly in the direction of the sleeping girl—"you will shoot her. But I believe I shall be able to return in time. There has been no sign."

Ahmed wriggled.

"A child, Baas!" he protested, "scarcely twenty!"

"It is so written," instructed Stanhope sternly. "She must not fall into their hands. She, herself, would prefer death. And now, Ahmed, I am going."

"Allah guard you, Baas!" murmured Ahmed, his eyes following his beloved master with the look of a faithful dog.

A moment later, Stanhope urged the horse northward through the black night.

HOUR AFTER HOUR he picked his way carefully toward the hills, meeting no one upon the inky plains. All about him the night life of central Africa teemed. Now he heard the grunting cough of a lion, and he paused, tense, but no attack came; then he heard the whistle of a browsing rhinoceros; at intervals came the barking call of zebras or the shrieking of jackals. Low, above the southern horizon, blazed the Southern Cross. Once his horse put her foot into a meercat hole, but luckily recovered in time.

As he approached the pass—a low, dry *donga*, or watercourse, that ran between two high hills—he left the rough trail and took to the grass. Then, dismounting and leading his horse, he went forward. Somewhere in front of him, the Masai warriors were hidden in the bush, awaiting the soldiers.

With infinite caution he went forward, for he must not only watch for human foes, but for lions as well. At this time of the night the lordly beasts hunted through the grass for their nightly kill.

Once or twice the horse started violently, and snorted with terror. He had all he could do to hold her. Then the moon broke out from behind some clouds and the plains were flooded with white, eerie light.

Scarcely had he taken a dozen steps when a shot sounded to his right, and his horse plunged forward, coughed once or twice, and died. Instantly Stanhope was away into the tall grass, which, in some parts of the plains, grew almost as tall

as his head. If he could reach the taller, grass-grown spots, he might be safe. All about him he was conscious of the unseen motions of men. They knew, approximately, where he was, and were creeping closer.

Crouching, he went forward to the left to skirt the hill. All at once, a strong pair of black arms reached out from behind the shadow of a thorn tree, and the next moment a life and death struggle was being silently fought.

The big Masai was a powerful man, but, like most natives, he possessed no stamina. After his first fierce effort, the endurance of white muscles began to tell. Stanhope possessed a leonine strength seldom attributed to him. His long, slender limbs, supple as Damascus steel, seemed to twine and writhe about the Masai warrior like a python. At all costs the man must make no noise. Steel fingers fastened upon the savage throat with a relentless fixity that could not be broken. Not a sound had either uttered since the struggle began. Again the moon raced behind some clouds, and Stanhope breathed a sigh of relief.

The darkness might save him. Suddenly releasing the savage, who lay inert, he sprang away into the tall grass. He could hear the savages making their way toward the spot where the struggle had taken place.

He heard their exclamations of alarm when they found the unconscious warrior, and he heard the sounds that told him they were spreading out in pursuit. Slowly he crept upon his way, every faculty and muscle alert for whatever might come.

He had lost his rifle during the struggle, and now carried only the big automatic pistol.

TOWARD MIDNIGHT he met the troops. Great strong fellows they were, mostly of southern Zulu blood, under the command of white officers, a captain and several lieutenants. The whites were amazed to see him, and en-

thusiastic over his feat—for it was a brave thing he had accomplished.

He smiled at their congratulations and enthusiasm. He had no apprehensions. In all the world there was no one who loved him, save, possibly, the faithful Ahmed. He had no living relatives to lament, were death his portion; no woman waiting anywhere for the sound of his voice. The one woman in all the world who could bring value to his life was another's. He was not afraid to face death, for life held nothing for him that would cause him one backward glance. He rode alone—unencumbered.

Briefly he sketched the events to the white officers.

"It's those cursed German outlaws," bitterly complained the captain. "Some of that crew that escaped from the Kameroun are living in the bush all over the lower country. We'll get those that caused the trouble here," he finished, grimly. Then: "That's a damn queer story about the girl, Major. Tell me about it."

Stanhope gave him all the facts in his possession.

"I'll have a try at locating some of her relatives when I get back to Nairobi," he finished.

"Poor devil!" said the captain, touched. "Her husband, Ben-Ali Batouche, had a price upon his head. Did you know that, Stanhope?"

Stanhope said he did. "Are you carrying a surgeon?" he asked.

"No," replied the captain. "Didn't think there would really be any trouble, and besides, there isn't one at the station now. Our man's at Port Florence, doctoring the plague. We'll bring the girl out to Kajabi, and get her a doctor."

The rest of the way they rode in comparative silence. They took another trail, and avoided the ambush; and, as the first rays of dawn tinted the sky, the little company rode up to the mission.

This seemed to be a signal to some hidden sharpshooters near the river bank, for immediately several scattered shots

fell amongst them. Two saddles were emptied.

THE SOLDIERS went into action at once, and a few minutes later the war-like Masai and their white allies had been scattered. Some took to the open forests to the south; some went toward the hills in the west and disappeared; the rest lay where they fell.

The captain came back to Stanhope and saluted.

"I would suggest, Major, that we teach these blacks a lesson as an example to the others."

"Use your own judgment, Captain," replied Stanhope. "You know what to do in a case like this."

The captain's eyes sparkled.

"I'll teach 'em a lesson they won't forget in a hurry," he said. He was angry at the loss of several of his troopers. "There will be no mercy."

So fire was set to the crops of maize and kaffir corn; the big, banana shambas were cut down, and the cattle were rounded up and marched under escort to Kajabi.

The soldiers set about cleaning up the native village and camped in it, while the white officers set up their snowy tents on the banks of the river near by.

For several days all was quiet. Stanhope and Ahmed tended to the sick girl. She seemed to be getting better under Ahmed's tender nursing, but her mind was a blank. She remembered nothing. Stanhope pitied her greatly. The white officers shook their heads and advised that he move her to the railroad for medical treatment as soon as possible.

"I shall," he declared. "As soon as she is strong enough to stand the journey."

Then a runner came from Kajabi with instructions that the troops were to remain in the vicinity until further orders. General Claxton was worried, and wanted available troops in the southern part of the plain if they should happen to be needed. It began to look like a semi-permanent encampment, and later,

under escort, several of the white officers' wives came to Butonga.

To these women Stanhope confidently went and told the story of the wounded girl. Would they take her under their care, and take her back with them to Mombasa? Would one of them take her into her home and look after her?

The white women smiled.

"Really!" said these fastidious ladies, "he was very simple!"

They laughed calmly, secure in their own impregnable respectability. Such a story! And such a history the girl had! She probably wasn't even married to the Arab adventurer. And then, she had been in the back woods with him, Stanhope, for a long time alone.

"Really, Major Stanhope—that's asking too much!"

STANHOPE flushed hotly. He took his leave without another word. Leading his horse, he made his way to the forest fringed shore of the river. He was in a fury of anger at the insinuations of the immaculately virtuous white women. He could have strangled them both for their smug viciousness. He foresaw how these same women, with others of their type, would make life a miserable burden for the wounded, bruised, mindless girl at the mission; he could imagine the insinuations and falsehood that would be set afloat and live the lusty life that a lie usually lives in common with other blatant, poisonous things. He foresaw the echoed calumny that would be flung carelessly, brutally against this unfortunate, helpless child, as a low hand besmirches a marble statue with mud, beastily pleased to see the pure whiteness of it stained.

He could not abandon her. There wasn't a soul interested whether she lived or died, except himself; and her youth, her grievous hurt, her helplessness, all urged his protection in a way he could not disregard. Money, alone, was inadequate.

For over an hour he paced the bank,

hidden from the camp by the lush growth. His mind alternated between two great extremes of action. Finally, with a grim setting of his lips, he turned toward the camp. His life had little value at best, to others or to himself, he reflected, bitterly. Avis would undoubtedly soon be returning to the United States to marry the man of her choice, leaving him with a dreary future that even hope could never illumine. So, with a Quixotic resolution, chivalrous and startling enough to have fired the blood of the old Don himself, he mounted and made his way to the chaplain's tent.

That gentleman greeted him cordially, for he had known Stanhope for years and admired him.

"Well, my boy," he said, "it looks as if our work here is finished."

"Yes," agreed Stanhope. "Will you favor me by riding over to the mission?"

The chaplain's expression changed instantly. "Did—did that child die?" he asked, in a low voice.

"No," answered Stanhope gravely. He eyed the chaplain with a faint smile, though his eyes remained grave. "I want you to marry us," he added.

"Marry you!" the Irishman was stunned.

Stanhope nodded.

"Exactly!" he said. "I want you to marry us today. After you go, it will be difficult to find anyone around here to perform the ceremony."

"You're crazy!" charged the chaplain, doubting his ears.

"No," said Stanhope quietly, "the child is helpless. Her husband is dead and so are all his people—except that one Kivirondo who got away. I searched for the *sefari*, and all I found on the spot where the fight took place was—where the hyenas had had a feast. She's utterly alone. Someone has to look after her, care for her—"

"But her history—" began the bewildered chaplain.

For one instant a flame came into Stanhope's eyes, so dark, so dangerous, that

the chaplain involuntarily recoiled. Then a lazy, inscrutable smile played upon his lips.

"I've considered that," he answered, still grave.

"And how about your future in the service—"

The chaplain stopped. He did not like the look in Stanhope's eyes. That gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped," he said. "She's helpless and wounded, and I'm going to look after her."

Several of the pleasant little suggestions that the officers' wives had let drop crossed his mind. His face grew cold and stern.

"I shall look after her," he continued. "I want to be sure that no one casts lying reflections upon her. I want the legal right and authority to see that she meets no injury at anyone's hands."

The chaplain eyed him quizzically. There was a hint of something in his smile that caused Stanhope to flush suddenly. "But you don't love her, do you, Stanhope?" asked the chaplain.

"No, I don't. I want merely the legal right," he repeated, slowly. "That is the only position I shall ever fill in her life."

THE chaplain shrugged his shoulders and ordered his horse. "You understand that her mental condition hardly makes such a marriage legal. I doubt if it's binding or lawful."

"It will allow me to look after her. That's all I wish. Mrs. Grundy must be propitiated."

"It's a funny thing to do, Stanhope," said the chaplain, though there was some admiration in his tone. "You're a good boy, though I believe you are acting very foolishly—too much *noblesse obligé*."

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders.

"We are all entitled to our own opinions," he said. "And should you ever hear that I have gone to join the great majority, chaplain, will you please see that she is not utterly abandoned?"

"Always glad to do what I can,"

answered the chaplain, stealing a look at his friend's face. It was grave and set.

They did not have far to go. Soon they dismounted at the mission and entered.

Ahmed had washed the girl's face and made her comfortable. He had washed her clothes and dressed her. She was sitting up now, and was apparently on the road to recovery; however, she was still stiffly bandaged.

So with Ahmed and a native for witnesses, they were married. Stanhope instructed the girl what to say, though the great, blue eyes were innocent of any understanding. Her faint, sweet voice answered yes and no as she was instructed. Pity welled up in the heart of the man for her, so utterly helpless, so alone, an outcast.

When he kissed her, a curious, startled look came into her eyes, and she put her fingers to her lips; but the look faded. Again her eyes were blank, seeing nothing, understanding nothing.

It was soon over. The names were signed to the acknowledgment of marriage, the girl's hand being guided in the penciled name of her dead husband.

The chaplain prepared to go. "Well, Stanhope," he said, "let me congratulate you. Few men would be so unselfish. While I think you have acted hastily, I can admire your motives."

Stanhope shook the proffered hand, but answered nothing immediately. He was looking at the girl. She was his wife—Mrs. Allen Stanhope. What a mockery this marriage was to the bright pictures he had once painted! He turned to the chaplain.

"She needs a name and the position of wifehood," he said, "to make her existence possible. As Mrs. Stanhope, I can leave her any place under the protection of the British flag and be sure she will be properly cared for."

Ahmed folded the little paper on which the acknowledgment of marriage had been written, and putting it into an antique silver locket that he wore, he fas-

tened it on the girl's neck with a cord. It was her only wedding gift.

AFTER the chaplain left, the girl fell asleep, and Stanhope stood watching her with mixed feelings. There was no denying her great physical charm. Ahmed came softly to his side and stood watching the girl also.

"Is she not as fair as a rose from Allah's garden, Baas?" he asked softly.

Stanhope nodded and turned away suddenly. Later, he watched Ahmed as he was giving the girl some food. The Arab's actions were as gentle as a mother's.

The girl smiled at Ahmed, content, for he talked to her in soft Arabic, and she sometimes answered a word or two in the same tongue.

There was a new disturbance in Stanhope's mind. What would happen after the operation that was necessary to give her back her mind? A child, such as she was now, was one thing; a woman, in the full possession of her faculties, that was another. What would she say when she found herself married to him without her knowledge or consent?

Five weeks later, he installed her in a house in Mombasa, with Ahmed as her constant companion and assistant nurse. He hired an Arab woman to look after her wants and comforts. The bungalow was at the edge of the city, facing the mainland. Here, his wife had a large garden to spend her days in. She seemed quite happy and contented, and on the way to complete physical recovery.

A conference of medical men had decided that there was only one hope—to operate. And they whispered their doubts to one another as to the advisability of the action in her condition. Stanhope had gone weak at the thought. He looked at the small, delicate head, with its wealth of golden hair; the peach-tinted skin and the utter helplessness of her; the childlike, questioning eyes. He could not bring himself to agree with the surgeons.

"Let it go for a while," he said. "Perhaps—"

An elderly surgeon of great experience smiled.

"There is only one chance," he said, "and that is to operate. And even then, it may not be successful; in fact, it might be fatal." He eyed Stanhope gravely. "Your wife is in a rather—delicate condition."

"Why, she seems all right physically, doctor. I imagine she is looking better every day." He was puzzled by the doctor's tone and look.

The doctor gave him a brief, keen survey.

"I cannot allow an operation now," he said. "In any event it would be a dangerous business, but in her condition, not to be thought of."

"Her—condition?" Stanhope was nonplussed.

"Yes," went on the doctor. "Perhaps motherhood will restore her mind. It sometimes performs strange freaks, and perhaps we will not have to operate. Don't you know that she will become a mother—sometime in the future?"

"A—mother!" he whispered, scarce comprehending.

The blood flooded to his face, and then left him pale as chalk.

He trembled with an emotion that left his throat dry.

The doctor nodded. He had heard the history of this strange marriage, as indeed, had everyone in Mombasa by now. He hardly knew what to make of it. For him, as for many others, the circumstances were veiled in dark mystery. Various wild tales went the rounds of the gossips, who added here and there some fanciful bits that pleased their imaginations.

Naturally the women made the most of it. Stanhope and his wife were the subjects of many whispered confidences over teacups. He was too important a figure to be overlooked, and salacious tongues joyously rolled this choice morsel of scandal with that chuckle of grim satis-

faction with which human nature surveys human frailty.

"No doubt," said one sarcastic lady, "she is a very charming person, very much misjudged; but all we can judge by is that she has dragged her hair in the dust, and made a little beast of herself with Stanhope—or some Arab—or worse! Heaven knows what the true circumstances really are! My dear, it's an utterly impossible situation, and of course, we can't receive her, even for Stanhope's sake. He's a dear, but—"

STANHOPE'S MARRIAGE fluttered the dove-cotes of the consciously immaculate. It satisfied their nostrils to find an apparent foulness. The world, somehow, likes to remember faults instead of virtues. It likes to remember that Rousseau was a beast; that Milton was a brute; that Heloise and Hypatia were loose women; that Phidias was a thief. And the world will never change.

Stanhope smiled grimly when he saw the attitude of the women. It bothered him very little. He possessed an independence of thought and action that comes to those who live much in the great, open, out-of-doors.

The men treated him quite differently. Most of them were enthusiastic. Some said that Stanhope was the "whitest man in the service."

The fact that his wife was to become a mother had given him several bitter hours. It complicated the entire matter distressingly, and he vaguely sensed that the future brooded with vexation, trouble and unnamed difficulties. He decided, however, to meet whatever came as best he could. She was his wife. The child would be his, too. He was their buffer, standing between them and an unsympathetic world. He knew that the child would cause untold speculation, but he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

But not all the women shunned his house. There was one who braved public opinion and came: Alice Throckmorton.

Stanhope had frankly told her father

the entire circumstances without any embellishments. Some parts of his simple, direct narrative were brutally frank. He made them so. He wanted no misunderstanding in the matter. The girl was a mindless, wounded, helpless thing. He explained with slow, painful difficulty that the only position he would ever fill in her life was that of a legal protector. The two men had clasped hands at the end of the explanation in perfect, mutual understanding, and Stanhope left. The General had gone to his study in deep thought, divided in opinion as to whether Stanhope was a great fool, or the greatest of altruists.

Plagued and teased, he had told his level-eyed daughter as much of the story as he could. She intuitively guessed the rest of it. And although the news of the sudden and incomprehensible marriage was a death blow to the dearest dream of her life, she could not but admire the startling unselfishness of the man's action. It piqued her at first, hurt her deeply; then she put on her hat and went to visit Mrs. Stanhope.

She had a difficult half-hour with Stanhope, who appreciated the courage of her action in the face of public opinion. She left understanding him better than ever before; his fierce defense of the girl so unexpectedly thrown into his keeping by capricious fate. It closed the door to her. She wondered how Avis Talmage felt about the matter.

AVIS and her father were in Mombasa now for an indefinite period. As soon as it was deemed safe, they intended to go back to Butonga and take up their work again.

Alice Throckmorton knew that Stanhope loved Avis. But she did not know that Avis was betrothed to one of her own countrymen. Therefore, Stanhope's Quixotic action puzzled her greatly. She concluded that the American girl did not love Stanhope, and had given him his *congé*. That made matters better for her. She smiled when she thought of it. His

wife was a small matter. There were ways and means once his affections were enlisted.

It was inevitable that Stanhope should meet Avis in Mombasa. Although he seldom took part now in the various gaieties of the bright little sea-port, his duty at times brought him in contact with the same people with whom Avis and her father associated.

He had not seen her since the night in the garden, nor had he had any word of her. He did not even know that she was in Mombasa, believing her rather to be at Nairobi. It was therefore, an unnerving shock for him to meet her face to face as he absently strolled about the country club gardens.

He had been waiting for General Claxton to put in appearance. He paused in stupefied silence, the blood hammering wildly through every vein.

The girl, pale, stampeded, unconsciously put one hand to her heart. Everything seemed to go black about her. For a moment she thought she was going to lose consciousness; then, his voice, speaking her name as if it were a caress, recalled her.

"Avis!"

Then for the space of half a minute they stood and looked at one another in silence. The girl recovered her equipoise first.

"How do you do, Major Stanhope?" she said, striving to make her voice casual.

It was a brave effort, but not quite successful. The blood rushed to his face, stinging him. He ignored her salutation.

"Avis!" he said again. "You—have—heard?"

And now the tears brimmed to her eyes suddenly, and the long lashes dropped upon the exquisitely moulded cheeks.

"About—about your—marriage, you mean?" she faltered, bravely looking up at him. "Yes, I have. It's terrible, about your—wife, I mean. They say she's very ill. Is she? Will she get w-well . . . ?" Her voice broke.

He clenched his hands until the nails

bit into his palms. The sight of her revived again the old longing, the immortal hunger. A nausea rose within him at the mockery of his life. He trembled at the thought of what love from this girl would mean to him. Then he shook the thought off with savage intensity. It could never be. And as he looked at her, a sickly sense of his own impotence to ever overcome the barriers between them, left his blood stagnant.

They were in a little secluded retreat, quite alone and invisible to the white-clad promenaders on the broad verandahs. Dense thickets of native shrubs and trees intervened.

"Avis," he said, at length, when the silence between them grew tense with suppression, and the uttermost limits of endurance had been reached, "I want you to know something about my marriage. I don't want you to think that I—changed—so suddenly. There are some ugly rumors afloat about my marriage. Of course, they're not true. When I knew I—could never have the—one woman I love, I counted my life as not of much worth . . . and I gave it to this poor child, because she needed protection and a name . . . the position of wifehood to make her very existence possible. There was never—never the question of—love. . . ."

"I know," she whispered, when he paused, unable to continue. "I—know." Some color had returned to her cheeks, and she was nervously twisting her tiny handkerchief. They both stood looking out across the blue waters of the sea, sunny and smiling under the caress of the tropic sun.

"I want you to know," he continued, presently, "that I never saw her before the night when I found her, wounded and bruised, near the mission. I shall never love anyone but—"

"Don't!" she cried. "Please . . ."

He bit his lips savagely. "I beg your pardon," he said, in a low, anguished tone. "I forgot. I have no right . . ."

"I—I—must go," she faltered. "I—I—"

hope your—wife recovers . . . I . . .
I . . .”

Then she swiftly disappeared around the winding path, and, like all wounded things, sought seclusion. She crept into a deserted nook facing the sea, and here her self-possession gave way. Great, tearless sobs came, such as women cry over their dead.

Later, spent, weary, heart-sick, she sat and looked upon the shimmering sea with unseeing eyes. She had seen the unutterable love in his eyes, but of what avail to tell him, now that she had broken her engagement immediately she discovered her true feelings? A higher wall reared between them now than ever before. She had broken the fetters of her engagement with a simple explanation; no such easy escape was open to him—even supposing he desired an escape. He was married, and knowing the circumstances, she could not accept her happiness at the expense of the wife to whom Stanhope meant so much, perhaps life itself.

A LONG TIME she sat, occasionally shivering as with cold. His presence had proved a revelation to her. His voice, his look had gone straight to her heart. The very air had seemed to grow lighter, the very earth seemed lovelier, because he was with her for a moment.

Thrice happy are those to whom the dream of their youth is fulfilled in their youth; to whom the consummation of dearest ambition comes in full, sweet fruitage in the morning of life, while yet the dreams have not faded to the eager, longing eyes that watch its advent. But when, instead, youth must behold the golden fruit of desire from afar, and know it to be forbidden, to watch its bloom fade through the lonely pilgrimage of empty years, then life seems more bitter than death.

Avis tasted deeply of the cup of despair at the thought of the empty years to come, of his wife. Nominal though the title was, it effectively shut the gates of her Arcadia against her, and she pressed

the jagged iron of her hunger into her breast, and tried bravely to face a future in which she had no interest.

Finally, she made her way to the club house and asked her father to take her home.

STANHOPE stood where she had left him for many minutes; then, in a dull stupor he made his way to the shore and sat hour after hour knowing nothing but the disordered riot of his faculties; the tumult that ached now for the first time in deep, unsuspected, unplumbed depths.

When the stars had trailed out in the wake of the sun, like timid, yellow jewels in a heaven of dusky velvet, he rose and sought General Claxton.

The General greeted him quietly, and took him into the smoking room.

It seemed that there was a great *ingowa*—or gathering—of powerful chiefs in the back country, and the General thought Stanhope ought to attend the ceremony and smooth any troubled waters that might arise.

“Major Thorndyke is there at present, and is keeping native runners going every day. There may be no need of your going, but after what happened at Butonga, I am afraid that there is trouble brewing. Now, you know the chiefs and they know you. A little talk might avert unpleasantness—to say the least—and probably do more good than a regiment of cavalry. If we maintain personal and friendly contact we shall have no trouble.”

Stanhope gravely concurred. “I shall start for Kajabi in a few days. From there, I shall take a cavalry escort and go to the *ingowa*.”

Then he took his leave and went home. He hated to leave his wife alone. Finally he determined that Ahmed should stay behind. He would have preferred to have Ahmed with him, but there was no one else to leave with the dependent girl. That night he explained the matter to Ahmed, and explained why he must stay in Mombasa with his wife.

"The whole city—all Mombasa, is hostile toward her, Ahmed."

"Baas!" protested the faithful Ahmed.

"Yes, I ride alone, Ahmed," instructed Stanhope. "You must stay and look after her. In a few days I take the trail to the Kenai country. I may be gone a long time, Ahmed. It may even be that I shall not ever come back. If it is so written, you must always look after her. There is no one else to do it."

"It is an order," said Ahmed, sadly.

He wrinkled his nose as a dog might. He was not pleased.

STANHOPE walked into the room where his wife sat. As usual, she was sitting by a window, looking vacantly at the sky. She turned and greeted him with her usual blank smile. She always smiled to him now, but the eyes still were blank of any comprehension. He made some slight preparations for departure, and, as African travel holds many dangers, he wrote a will for the first time in his life, leaving everything to the helpless Mrs. Stanhope, and went to bed.

Accustomed to the ever-present dangers of his past life in the interior, he was a light sleeper. Late that night his retrained senses caught sounds outside of his window. Alert in a moment, he listened. Someone was trying a window, and it was proving stiff and obdurate. He slid from the bed, drew on his dressing gown, and picked up his service Browning; then he stepped to the door and was astounded to see Ahmed standing there.

"Baas!" whispered Ahmed, in a frightened tone. "I've seen him! He has come to kill you! He—"

"Who?" asked Stanhope, bewildered. "Who has come, Ahmed?"

Ahmed made several inarticulate noises. He was badly frightened.

"Ben-Ali Batouche!" he finally said.

Stanhope stared. "He did not die?" he gasped.

"No—quick! I have seen him. I will talk to him, Baas. He would not listen to you. Quick—"

"But—"

"No!" whispered Ahmed fiercely. "He would not listen to you! He will kill you—he is big—like a tree—"

A knife suddenly gleamed in Ahmed's hand.

"Not that, Ahmed," said Stanhope, in a low voice. "We must not—"

He did not finish, but stepped out into the dark hallway.

Ahmed suddenly put his hands upon his master's shoulders and bent him down. "Hush!" he ordered. "Not a sound!"

So they stayed for nearly a minute, breathless, listening to the vague sounds that told of someone in Ahmed's room. Stanhope's faculties were stunned by this new contretemps, its bearing upon his own life, his future; but he had very little time for cogitation. Slowly the door opened and a tall figure stepped out into the hall.

Before Stanhope could prevent it, Ahmed had hurled himself silently upon the intruder, and the two went to the floor in a writhing heap. Not a sound did either make as they struggled. Stanhope went to Ahmed's assistance, but it was all both of them could do, after several minutes of terrific exertion, to master the fury of the intruder. At last he lay—a giant of a man—hands and feet tied.

STANHOPE lit a lamp and they sat him up in a chair. Both he and Ahmed were breathing hard with the exertion, but the giant was calm. He was a magnificent specimen of manhood, handsome and fierce as a black-maned lion. His physical beauty was clamorous, almost feminine, save for the suggestion of fierceness—the eyes like a desert hawk's.

"You are Ben-Ali Batouche?" asked Stanhope, when he had sufficiently recovered his breath.

The giant glared, but answered nothing. He looked at them both with murder in his eyes. Ahmed had possessed himself of Stanhope's Browning, and returned the giant's look.



"He shook his head gravely. She was looking up at him with . . . unfaltering eyes, like those of a child, innocent enough to look upon passion unafraid."

"We all thought you were dead," continued Stanhope, in a low, tired voice. "Please don't struggle that way—I'll set you free in a minute. There's no call for all that. Before I untie you, however, I want you to listen to me for a few minutes."

Then in a quiet voice, he told the Arab all that had occurred, sometimes lapsing into Arabic to make a meaning clearer to the giant. But when he started to speak hesitatingly about the marriage, an exclamation from Ahmed stopped him. Over the prisoner's head Ahmed made a swift motion of caution. It was unseen by the prisoner. Stanhope skillfully covered the interruption, and went on with the story, giving Ahmed the credit that was due him in caring for the girl. When he finished, the giant was eyeing him with suspiciously moist eyes.

They unbound him and he sat looking at them, uneasy. Ahmed had been watching him intently; now he made a few rapid passes with his fingers. Ben-Ali stared.

"The Prophet?" he whispered, repeating the sign.

Ahmed nodded eagerly, and made another sign, which was also repeated. The two men looked at one another, and their attitude changed perceptibly.

"What he has told you," said Ahmed, in swift Arabic, "is true—every word. I swear it! Myself, I have watched over her every hour. She is yours—body and soul!"

As Stanhope listened, his teeth came together. It had never occurred to him that Ben-Ali might question his interest in the girl, or suspect his motives.

For a few minutes Ahmed and the big stranger conversed in low, swift sentences; then Ahmed turned to Stanhope.

"Baas," he said, softly, "he wishes to speak to her. He knows she is here, and I have told him it is true. He found out from some people in the native quarter. At first he thought you were a bad man who had stolen his wife, and he was going to kill you; but he knows now that you

acted as a friend. He is thankful. He would like to see and speak with her."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until morning? He can stay here until then, and then speak with her."

"It is a test," explained Ahmed, patiently. "Perhaps if she sees him suddenly, her mind will return. I have heard—but never mind—"

A sudden light broke over Stanhope. "Good Lord!" he muttered softly. "I wonder!"

Ahmed and Ben-Ali went to the door of the girl's room, and here they conferred again in whispers. The result was that Ahmed brought several lamps. They were all lighted and placed about the girl's room, the men moving softly so as not to wake her. When there was sufficient light concentrated near the bed, Ben-Ali took his place at the foot of it and Stanhope and Ahmed watched from the door.

Ben-Ali, his frame trembling, beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, shook the bed with some force, and at the same time called to her—an Arabic diminutive of endearment.

THE GIRL woke, and looked at the figure standing beside the bed. Stanhope and Ahmed, watching from the doorway, saw her bewildered look; then a terrible, piercing scream broke from her lips. She grew purple as she sat up, still staring, the sweat of a violent emotion breaking out on her forehead.

"Ben-Ali!" she screamed, and the next moment she was in his arms, gasping and weeping, while the giant ravenously covered her face with kisses. Then, pale as death, she suddenly slumped in his arms and fainted.

"It is well," whispered Ahmed to Stanhope. "When next she opens her eyes, her mind will be as always. See, Baas, how men are! Many women have loved him, but he only laughed at them and left them when he tired of them. This little one he loves with all his heart and would give his life for her; this one he made his

wife and risks much to come here for her. Truly, the ways of men are strange!"

They all sat up the rest of the night and talked. Ben-Ali showered Stanhope with his blessings. His wife was bewildered and could not be made to understand what had happened. She talked disconnectedly, and could remember nothing since the night when she had seen her husband shot down, and she had fled to the forests in horror. Once she broke down utterly, but Ben-Ali picked her up as if she were some toy and walked the floor with her as one would with an infant. He seemed oblivious of the presence of the others in the room.

At the first sign of dawn, Ben-Ali rose. "And now," he said gravely, "I go—and she goes with me. I know that you are a soldier—and that you know something of me. But I feel that you will not harm me or stop me. I am taking her to my friends in the south. I shall not forget the service you have rendered me. We shall meet again."

He looked Stanhope squarely in the eyes, led his wife to the door and opened it.

Stanhope, by every law of the land, should have turned the Arab over to the authorities, as he was a man with a price on his head; a man who was wanted in many places for illicit diamond dealing and ivory poaching. But he could not do it. He would just as soon have turned over the charming little wife to the government officials—and that was unthinkable. A grim smile lay in the corners of his mouth.

"Go in peace, Ben-Ali," he said. "You have nothing to fear from me."

"I am grateful," said Ben-Ali, in a low voice.

STANHOPE looked at the young wife with a blur in his eyes. A thousand thoughts bulleted through his faculties. While he was glad to restore the young girl to her husband, there still flickered a sardonic and impish voice within him that irritated him cruelly with a reiter-

ated: "Another man's wife—another man's wife—another man's wife."

The phrase seemed to go on endlessly, until a bitterness as of noxious drugs seethed through him. It was his fate, he told himself.

"Kismet! The third, and please God, the last time!"

He would tell General Claxton about this visit of Ben-Ali's in the morning. The General would probably coincide with his action, all things considered. Sometimes the law of humanity rose above the law of the land. He anticipated no difficulty.

He had been in a haze throughout the whole fantastic night, shifting the burden of all things to the capable Ahmed. He was infinitely weary and jaded.

"My friends wait outside," Ben-Ali was saying. "I wish to be gone before the sun rises."

An instant he paused on the threshold, looking back at Stanhope.

"We shall meet again," he repeated. "I shall not forget," and was gone.

Outside, in the shadowy dawn, Stanhope saw a plains wagon with a canvas top. Ben-Ali and his wife entered, and the next moment they were rolling swiftly away.

Ahmed led the way back to his master's room.

Day was just breaking. He held out a paper to Stanhope.

"What is it?"

"The marriage paper," said Ahmed. "I took it from her when he came. It is best that he should not know. He might not understand."

Stanhope nodded. "Later, Ahmed," he instructed, "you will take it to the chaplain who married us and tell him everything. Tell him the marriage must be annulled—he will understand when you explain. I shall probably see him myself later, and explain it all."

A narcotic listlessness possessed him. He rather welcomed the duties that would soon take him to the interior.

"Baas," said Ahmed softly. "You start

on *sefari* in a day or so. There is now no reason to stay—”

Stanhope smiled at Ahmed with sudden affection.

“We ride together, Ahmed,” he said.

CHAPTER IX

MOMBASA seethed once more with rife speculation and excitement when Stanhope's marriage was annulled. Again the story of the marriage and the cause for annulment went the rounds of barracks, living-room and clubs. It made a bizarre story, with something of the flavor of other centuries in it.

Stanhope, a telegram in his hand, searched the verandah of the country club for General Claxton, and found Alice Throckmorton instead. She looked up from the magazine she was reading as he approached, and greeted him. Inquiring after her father, he was told that the general had gone off on the golf course; so Stanhope sat down to wait. With her permission, he lit a cigarette. Alice regarded him with keen eyes. She saw the tired lines of his mouth; the shadows under the eyes; the weary resignation.

“You're not looking well, Allen,” she said. “Why don't you stop work and play for a while? Take a trip to the highlands, back country? This low seacoast of ours is telling on you.”

He smiled and waved the telegram.

“That's what I wanted to do,” he answered, “but I thought I'd have to go into the interior again. However, that's not necessary according to this. I wanted to see your father about a furlough.”

ACROSS THE LAWN a girl was strolling, twirling a brilliant sunshade. As she turned toward them for an instant, Stanhope started. It was Avis. Something urged him to his feet. Alice saw the look in his eyes, the girl across the lawn, and her eyes dropped suddenly.

Two young men came up at this moment, clamoring for her company, and Stanhope excused himself and started across the lawn. She called after him:

“I'll tell father about the telegram and the—furlough.”

He smiled his thanks, and continued on his way, while Alice, smiling, listened to the two eager boys and heard not a word.

“He will need the furlough,” she thought, bitterly, “for a honeymoon.”

She was seized by a sort of madness, the fury of a wounded tigress. For a moment, she wanted to spring, to rend, to kill. She could have slain him at a blow rather than see him go to another. The paroxysm passed; she grew calmer; then, she, who was as strong as a young oak, collapsed.

“The sun,” was the verdict. “It has been terribly hot today.”

Stanhope followed the white-clad figure of Avis until he caught up with her in the glade, where, once before, they had met.

“Avis!” he said, barely above a whisper.

The girl turned and looked at him, and a deep wonder and amazement came over him. In that one, all-illuminating, clairvoyant moment, the look in her eyes told him that she was free. And in another moment she was in his arms, sobbing, cooing, caressing, all in bewildering sequence.

“Didn't you know,” she whispered finally, “that I have been—free, since the night you first asked me? Didn't you—guess?”

He shook his head gravely. She was looking up at him with dimmed, worshipping eyes; confident, unfaltering eyes, like those of a child, innocent enough to look upon passion unafraid.

“I—I—love you so!” he murmured brokenly, unable to find any but the old, old simple words to tell the great emotion that swelled his heart.

She closed her eyes, trembling a bit; her arms tightened about his neck as she lifted moist, tremulous lips to his kisses.

*"'Handy,' he said, 'I've got a job for you
throw the best rope in the State. You can play
weight*



MR. HANDY SMOKES

By Paul Everman

"Two hundred," said Handy doggedly, "or I won't go."

"All right"—peevishly—"two hundred."

"Two hundred," said Handy, "and one of them elk-tooth watch chains like yours."

He pointed a greedy finger towards Remser's gray vest.

Remser played with the watch chain and the dangling elk's-tooth. The chain was gold, and heavy.

"All right," he said grudgingly, at last. "We start tomorrow."

When they stepped down from a "flivver" before the grayish adobe ranch-house of the Double K ranch a few days later, Handy got his first glimpse of Bee Wilkins. She came running out to meet them, her frothy blonde hair shining eerily under the bright Western sun.

"Ah, glad to see you, Bee," said Remser, his tight lips parting in an avid smile. "I want you to meet my friend Mr. Handy. Mr. Handy is a business associate of mine from the East."

Mr. Handy expanded. Mr. Handy was a very different sort of person from "Handsome" Handy, a cow-puncher extraordinary. At Butte he had warped himself into a vivid amber suit—extra large size, but not large enough—from which at various convenient sectors his enormous person protruded dangerously.

Bee Wilkins gave him a dimpling smile and stretched out a plump hand of welcome.

"I'm awfully glad to know you, Mr. Handy."

WHEN Remser called "Handsome" Handy into the ranch-house of his Montana ranch and proposed a trip to New Mexico, he didn't explain that Bee Wilkins was the why and wherefore of his proposition. In fact, he didn't mention that charming young lady at all.

"Handy," he said, his cold eyes narrowed speculatively on the puncher, of whom there was much, distributed with little regard for grace and symmetry, "I've got a job for you down on my New Mexico ranch. I think you're the very man I want. You throw the best rope in the State. You can play poker with your eyes shut. You can lick your weight in lobos . . . Of course," he went on coolly, "you're an ugly brute, with your bow legs and your tomato face—whoever named you 'Handsome' undoubtedly had a sense of humor. But that makes you all the better for the job I have for you."

Whereupon, Remser unfolded his scheme, ending with: "We'll spend a month there. I'll pay you a hundred dollars and all expenses, including some decent clothes. It will be only a good vacation for you."

Handy considered.

"Two hundred," he said finally.

"One hundred is more than enough."

*down on my New Mexico ranch. . . . You
poker with your eyes shut. You can lick your
in lobos."*

AS CUPID SCORES

Illustrations by Dom Lavin



"Same here," said Mr. Handy.

"Miss Wilkins is the daughter of my foreman," explained Remser. "She keeps house for him. Is your father in, Bee?"

"No. He and Curly are down south pulling out a couple of bogged steers. But come on in. Your rooms are ready, and you can make yourselves at home on the front porch where it's cool."

SHE skipped into the house ahead of them. Mr. Handy watched her interestedly. And after he had taken an easy chair on the cool front porch and surreptitiously loosened his merciless "hard" collar, he did some dreaming and decided that he was going to enjoy his visit at the Double K.

"Now," said Remser the next morning, "we'll deal the first hand in our game."

They walked down past the reeling bunk-house—Mr. Handy with a swagger befitting the owner of an amber suit and wedge-shaped saffron shoes. Passing a calf-shed, they descended into a wide draw, in which the tall salt grass had been packed flat by the trampling of hoofs.

Here they found a group of cow-punchers judiciously watching a slender, curly-haired young fellow who had a long string of fresh hemp in his hands, whipping it free from kinks.

"I notice Curly's wearin' a patch on one o' his boots," observed one of the watching punchers, a squat person with thick grinning lips. "A feller that's on a hot trail o' love cain't afford to get

too spendthrift. When him and Bee starts housekeepin'—"

"Shut up, Squab," retorted Curly, his even teeth gleaming in a good-natured grin.

"Yo' ain't funny; yo' jest natchelly ain't right bright."

Amid the guffawing encouragement of the others, he went back to his job, stretching the rope tightly between two posts, and laying a heavy pole across the rope's middle.

At this juncture Remser descended with Mr. Handy in tow.

"Boys," he said, with his thin smile, "this is Mr. Handy, a business associate of mine from the East. He is to be with us for some time and is very anxious to experience all phases of Western life."

Remser pulled out a red box of cigarettes from a pocket of his pearl-gray coat and carelessly offered it to Mr. Handy.

"Smoke, Mr. Handy?"

"Uh—uh—don't care if I do."

Into a wondrously long cigarette-holder that exactly matched his new amber suit and gold watch chain, Mr. Handy adjusted the cigarette. Then, after a luxurious puff, he turned to the circling punchers.

"Say," he remarked, "I'm right smart glad to meet you gents—doncher know."

CURLY came up and stared curiously at the newcomer, from cigarette-holder to saffron shoes.

"English?" he inquired, in a friendly tone.

"New Yawk," said Mr. Handy languidly. "New Yawk and Boston."

"And yo' wants to see a little Western life?"

"Yass. I got a hankerin' for it—doncher know."

Curly turned to the others. "Boys," he cried impressively, "we'll have a snipe-hunt in Mr. Handy's honor!"

From the others came a booming chorus of approval.

"Snipe-huntin'," explained Curly to Mr. Handy, "is our greatest Western sport. They're a dandy little animal, snipes are, and the man who catches one is lucky as pay-dirt. I tell yuh, Mr. Handy, I won't feel satisfied till yo' catch and get to eat one o' them little animals! Can yo' go this evenin' Mr. Handy?"

Mr. Handy said that he could.

At sundown Mr. Handy and an effusive escort of punchers galloped down into an arroyo eight miles from the ranch. Pleading a headache, Remser had declined to come along with the party.

"Here's the place," said Curly mysteriously, dismounting and handing Mr. Handy a burlap bag. "The snipes come, one at a time, down into the arroyo here, and that bank of *mal pais*"—he pointed to the black bank of lava on the east—"heads 'em off."

"And then we shoot 'em, eh?" said Mr. Handy, in innocence obedient and colossal.

"Shoot 'em? No, sir! The Knight of the Chase stands right here patiently—for hours, if need be—with his legs apart and the bag between his knees. And when we round up them luscious snipes, they run down here into the arroyo and jump into the bag."

Curly turned to the others.

"Boys," he cried, "I make a move that we elect Mr. Handy to the post of honor—that we make him Knight of the Chase!"

"Hold on," grumbled Squab, with a mountainous assumption of jealousy. "Not so doggone fast! I ain't been Knight o' the Chase for nigh on to a year. I'm tired o' lettin' somebody else have all the fun."

"Mr. Handy is our guest," cut in Curly peevishly, while the others shouted in courteous approval.

MR. HANDY was elected and shown how to stand in exactly the proper position, with the bag held, mouth open, between his knob-like knees.

"Hold on," said Mr. Handy, as Curly started to ride away. "What for you takin' my hoss?"

Curly stopped.

"It's like this," he explained solemnly. "Snipes hate the smell of a cayuse, and if we don't take yours away with us we won't get nary snipe inside the arroyo. Luck to yuh, Mr. Handy!"

"Luck to yuh, Mr. Handy," roared the others as they plunged away, kicking up a thick billow of gray dust.

"Gone?" inquired a voice from behind the *mal pais* bank.

"Gone," returned Mr. Handy.

Remser rode out into view, leading an extra horse. "Hurry up. We can take a short cut and beat them back to the ranch."

When six hilarious punchers came galloping past the adobe ranch-house some time later, they glanced in at the wide porch. Their hilarity ceased, for on the porch, sprawling with sublime ease in the most comfortable chair, was Mr. Handy.

"I caught all o' them snipes the bag'd hold," he called out, waving a bored hand, "and then I come on in. Much obliged."

"Ow-w-w!" howled a half dozen disgusted punchers, and they charged for the corral.

"Score one for Remser," chuckled Remser, from a dark corner of the porch.

"And Handy," added Mr. Handy.

MR. HANDY was enjoying this new life immensely. His wardrobe especially was a source of sheer delight, and he developed a penchant for spending precious periods before the long mirror of his room. He toyed with the elk's tooth; smoked cigarette after cigarette in the elongated holder. Quite naively he compared himself with cattle kings, with governors, with millionaires and magnates.

He grew observant. He decided that Bee Wilkins' biscuits were the best that he had ever eaten. And, after hearing a private conversation between Bee and Remser the next morning, he did some weighty thinking.

He was on the porch, and the conversation came from inside.

"Well, Bee," came Remser's voice, in a sickly attempt at banter, "I suppose you and Curly will be hitching up, one of these days."

"I guess I could do worse, Mr. Remser."

"Assuredly; but permit me to add that Curly couldn't do better. Curly has good taste—even among the *señoritas*."

"What do you mean, Mr. Remser?"

Remser's laugh was cold, and malicious. "The sheepherder's daughter down west a way. Juanita Apodaca, I believe her name is—the one Curly paid gallant attention to once before. One of the boys said he saw them together down by the herder's shack day before yesterday. But perhaps I shouldn't have told—"

Mr. Handy sank back in his chair and pulled thoughtfully at his flat red nose.

"So," he mused, "that's it! The Old Man wants Bee for himself. He thinks mebbe if I show up the boys here, Curly specially, mebbe he'll be holdin' a royal flush and a license when the weddin' bells is rung. And they won't be Curly's weddin' bells, neither; they'll be Curly's funeral bells. And I'm to prepare the Old

Man's bridal trail. I'm supposed to be what he'd 'a' been if tuberculosis had give him a chance. Say!"

A DEPUTIZATION of punchers visited Mr. Handy that evening and invited him down to the bunk-house for a night of poker. Poker was a good mild, Western game, they explained, and if he didn't know it they could soon teach him.

"Sure," assented Mr. Handy. "I play. Why, up at Butte—"

At this juncture Remser kicked him, surreptitiously but with some violence.

"Butte?" cut in Curly. "I thought you said—"

Mr. Handy lifted a checking hand. "Allow me to finish—doncher know. I was goin' to say that up in *beaut-iful* New Yawk I've played a game or two. Glad to play with you—doncher know."

The game lasted far into the night. At two o'clock Mr. Handy opened the door of the bunk-house and stepped out into the moonlight.

"Good night, gents," he bowed suavely. "I've had a pleasant evenin',"

There was a patent bulge to his pockets as he walked; and in his room he snored the deep sleep of the lucky till Bee Wilkins called him to breakfast.

As Mr. Handy stepped out from his room, Remser was waiting for him.

"What luck?"

"Finest kind," returned Mr. Handy complacently. "I cleaned 'em—all that'd stick."

"Curly?"

"Nope. Curly got cold feet after he lost ten dollars. Said he wasn't goin' to risk any of the five hundred he had laid up for a weddin' stake."

"And two hundred of that is mine," scowled Remser.

WHILE Bee Wilkins was waiting on them at breakfast, Mr. Handy noticed a new, determined poise to the shapely head, and a glint in the blue eyes that was almost murderous.

"Get your slicker ready, Curly," he thought. "Looks powerful like a storm in your direction."

Hugely comforted, he left Remser on the porch and rolled down to the bunk-house, where Squab Mulligan was removing a worrisome tack from the inside of a high-heeled leather boot.

"What's this about Curly and this here Mexican *señorita*?" inquired Mr. Handy, in an affable wheeze, after they had chatted a few minutes.

"What *señorita*?" Squab seemed puzzled.

"Juanita, somebody said her name was."

"Juanita Apodaca? Nice girl. And Curly, you say?"

"Yass."

Squab pondered. "Reckon you must mean that time when Juanita sprained her ankle 'bout a year ago. Curly came along and picked her up and took her in to Pablo's camp. We joshed him some about it, and it made Bee kind o' jealous for a spell. That's all there was to it, though."

"It strikes me, old *chaparejos*," remarked Mr. Handy presently, in his best New York and Boston, "that my business 'sociate is dead bent on winnin' the hand o' this here Miss Wilkins."

Squab grunted.

"Shucks! If he did win it he wouldn't know how to play it."

Then the thick lips grinned maliciously. "Reminds me o' the time Curly trimmed the Old Man in a poker game. The Old Man got pretty hot about it, and made a unkind remark or two. And Curly— Say, mebbe I'd better keep my mouth shut, though, seein' that you're a friend o' the Old Man."

"Just a business 'sociate—doncher know," protested Mr. Handy, with a vast wave of the hand.

"Well, of course, one business 'sociate 'll tip off another to a little thing like a snipe-hunt. But Curly—Curly's handy with his dukes. He hog-tied the Old Man and put a sort o' bluish brand on one of his eyes that didn't come off for a month.

The Old Man swore he'd fire Curly, but we all said we'd pack our war-bags if he did. So Curly's still here."

"Quite int'restin'," said Mr. Handy.

"Say!" The sudden exclamation came from Squab, who had lost a month's wages the night before. "See that little cayuse over there?"

He pointed to a corral on the right.

Mr. Handy looked and observed:

"Nice little animal."

"Betcha! Finest in the country, if I do say it myself. Rides jest like a rock-in'-chair. Belongs to my string. Reckon you'll be wantin' to ride 'round the ranch a bit. Ought to have a regular saddle hoss while you're here. I tell yuh what I'm goin' to do, Mr. Handy—I'm goin' to put Beetle at your disposal while you're here! I'll saddle him and bring him 'round to the house for yuh in the morning!"

"Why, thankee!" said Mr. Handy.

"Thankee." And rising, he started for the ranch-house.

AS HE NEARED the porch, he saw the kitchen door fly open. Curly Taylor emerged and slammed the door. Then, with long, vicious strides, the puncher disappeared in the direction of the bunk-house, his big hat crushed down over his flushed face, his hand jammed into the pockets of his jeans.

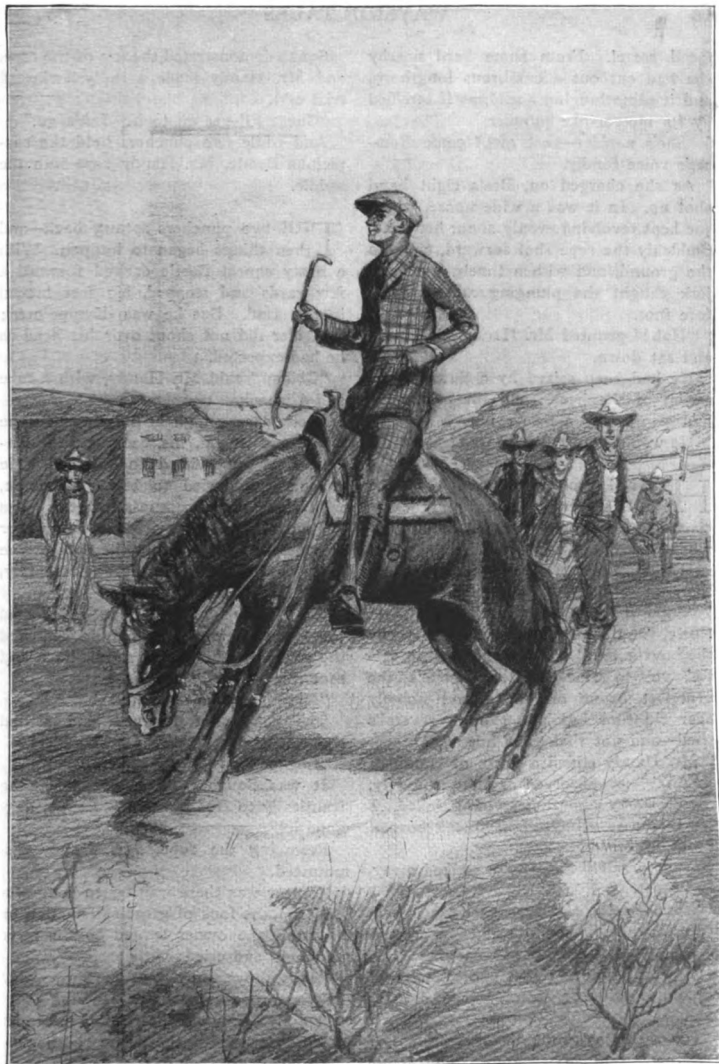
"Score two for Remser," came a chuckling voice from the porch.

"Sure," responded Mr. Handy; and under his breath he added:

"And for Handy."

Presently there came another slam from the kitchen door. Rawhide quilt in hand, Bee Wilkins came out. There was a hint of tears and a palpable show of defiance in her face as she walked swiftly toward the north corral. But Mr. Handy, who was watching, found her quite desirable in her moleskin riding-skirt and her brown waist, with cerise handkerchief fluttering about the collar.

A half hour later she came dashing past the ranch-house on a little blaze-



"Beetle sprang high in the air and came down stiff-legged, his back arched dangerously."

faced sorrel. From some herd nearby she had cut out a cumbrous long-horn, and it came lunging ahead, as if terrified by its meteor-like pursuer.

"She's a rider—that girl," came Remser's voice fondly.

As she charged on, Bee's right hand shot up. In it was a wide noose, which she kept revolving evenly about her head. Suddenly the rope shot forward, close to the ground, and with a timely backhand jerk caught the plunging animal by a fore foot.

"Hah!" grunted Mr. Handy admiringly and sat down.

He had been seized by a fluttery sensation of the heart, and that sensation had grown into a resolve:

He would marry Bee himself!

HAVING secretly entered the race for Bee's favor, Mr. Handy exercised vast loftiness over Curly Taylor when the latter called him out of the ranch-house for a word of admonition the next morning.

"Some jokes is jokes, Mr. Handy," said Curly, "and some jokes is murder. Now the boys is fixin' up one for yo'-all in gettin' yo' to ride Beetle. Beetle's the orneriest bronc on earth, and nobody ever rid him but me, though several's tried—and got their ribs busted."

Mr. Handy stifled a yawn of ennui.

"Ah," he observed condescendingly, "don't worry about me, young feller. I can take care of myself. I wasn't borned yesterday."

"Suit yo'self!" and Curly stalked away in disgust.

When Beetle, a wiry, treacherous-eyed little bay, arrived with an escort of punchers, Mr. Handy was ready.

"I want some o' them spurs," he told Squab, motioning toward the latter's heel.

His wish was granted.

"Now," said Mr. Handy, "you gents show me how to use one o' them ropes, and fix one on my saddle. I'll take one o' them cute little whips, too."

Squab demonstrated the use of the rope, and Mr. Handy made a sadly awkward trial cast.

"Guess I'll get on to it. Let's go."

And while two punchers held the suspicious Beetle, Mr. Handy rose into the saddle.

THE two punchers sprang back—and then things began to happen. With a nasty squeal Beetle dashed forward a few yards and stopped, his feet braced in the sand. But he was disappointed; the rider did not shoot over his head as he had expected.

"Giddap," said Mr. Handy, with a rake and a whack.

Beetle sprang high in the air and came down stiff-legged, his back arched dangerously. He twisted and bucked. He squealed and tried to bite. He knelt, with sickening abruptness. But a large gentleman who made vivid red-and-amber splashes of action before the eyes of the amazed onlookers, sat his seat securely, easily, imperturbably.

Mr. Handy had won. He had cowed Beetle completely. At last he snatched the rope from his nickel saddle-horn and sent it whirling in the air.

"Hi!" he yelled suddenly.

The rope shot forward and settled squarely about Squab's fat shoulders.

"Leggo!"

It was Squab, yelling and struggling frantically to free himself. "Leggo, dog-gone it!"

Releasing the rope, Mr. Handy dismounted.

Remser was there waiting to congratulate him. A look of great satisfaction on his face, the owner turned to the awed punchers and cried:

"This, boys, only goes to show what an Easterner with health can do."

To Mr. Handy he carelessly extended a hand containing the magic red box.

"Smoke, Mr. Handy?"

Mr. Handy fished for the elongated holder.

"U-huh—don't care if I do."

BUT the most glorious fruits of his victory were yet to come. At dinner Bee Wilkins told him that she had been perfectly charmed in watching him ride Beetle.

"To think, Mr. Handy, that you are the second person that has ever ridden Beetle!"

There was a new glint of exultation to Remser's snaky eyes as he dashed in:

"My dear Bee, this only goes to prove that, man for man, an Easterner is a match for any Westerner, provided"—he shook his head regretfully—"provided he has his health."

"Beetle was an easy one," observed Mr. Handy, quite drunk from this feminine adulation. "Why, last year up at the rodeo—"

A hasty kick checked him.

"At the rodeo?" repeated Bee wonderingly.

Mr. Handy retrieved himself.

"Uh—I was sayin' that in my frequent trips to the road-houses of old New Yawk—doncher know—I've often rode automobiles that had Beetle skinned a mile for rough ridin'."

"Oh!"

As they went out on the porch after dinner, Remser grabbed Mr. Handy's thick arm.

"Go back," he whispered. "Go back and tell her about my bad health."

"Sure," acquiesced Mr. Handy, grinning from a sudden inspiration.

He went back into the dining room, where Bee was redding up the table. His betrayal of Remser was as unblushing as tactless.

"Say, I don't reckon that you know that my business 'sociate is a tuberculosis."

"Yep. I feel sorry for Remser—always feel sorry for a weaklin' like him. Why, he's so puny that two or three ladies back in our society turned him down flat when he begged 'em to marry him. Our women back there kind o' shuns him."

"That's too bad," answered Bee uncer-

tainly. "But not all men can be big and strong like you, I guess."

"Nope; that's right. Now this here Curly—"

A flashing look cheered him.

"I used to think Curly was all he-man," said Bee slowly, at last. "He isn't as big as you, Mr. Handy, but he was always so strong and fearless. Now, though—Well, I don't know. But we won't talk about Curly," she added, painfully.

"Reckon not, if you say so. Say"—clumsily changing the subject—"I like this Western country. May decide to locate out here. Thinkin' some o' locatin' up in Montana. Ever been there?"

"No, I haven't. I always thought I'd like to go up there sometime, though."

"Mebbe you'll get to sometime," chuckled the subtle Mr. Handy, and escaped to the porch.

Remser motioned to him.

"What did she say?"

"Seemed to feel powerful bad."

"H—m!" Remser considered for a minute. Then, abruptly:

"Handy, I'll give you twenty-five dollars extra if you beat up Curly Taylor."

Beat up Curly Taylor! Mr. Handy was staggered, for he had been considering that very thing.

"Make it fifty," he grunted, hiding his grin.

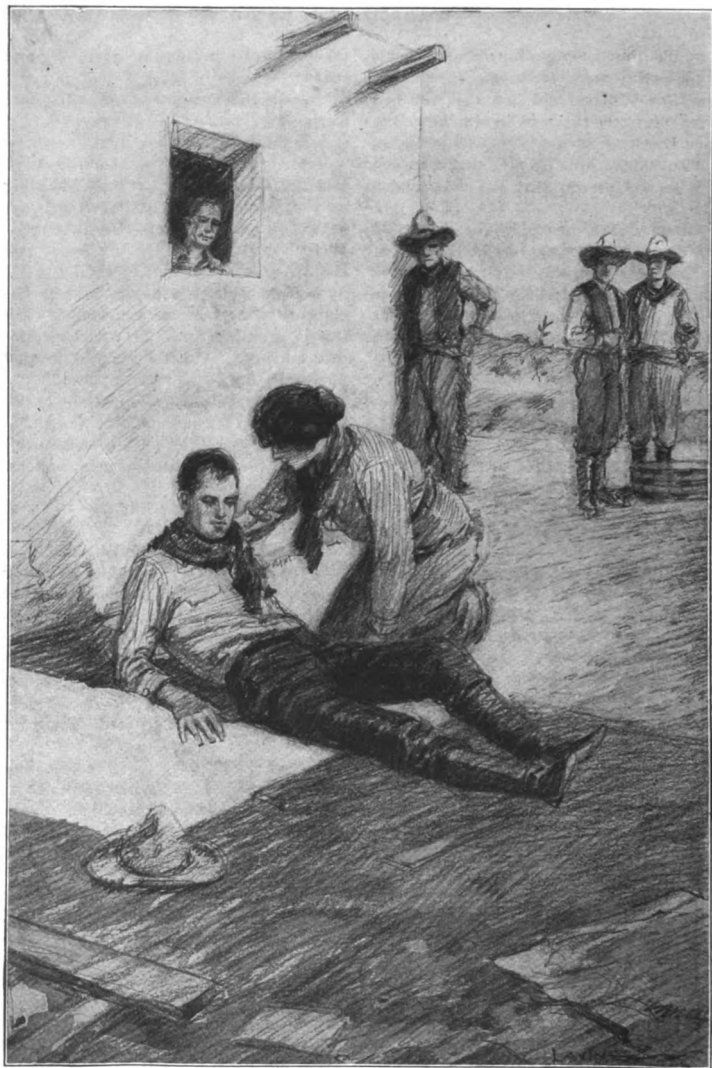
Remser finally gave him the fifty dollars and departed for the blacksmith shop, saying that he would have one of the "hands" tell Curly that Mr. Handy wished to see him at the ranch-house.

ALONE, Mr. Handy smiled a sweet vast smile of a general who has laid his plans well, blessed by the favor of the gods.

Mr. Handy had settled for Remser, and now he would put the finishing touches to the elimination of Curly Taylor.

Truly this was his luck day!

Remser came back and with a malicious smile dodged into the house. Presently Curly came striding up to the



"'Curly, dear, you aren't dead—are you, Curly? Curly!'"

porch. Mr. Handy stripped off his amber coat and descended to meet him.

"Want to see me?" inquired Curly.

"Naw," replied Mr. Handy, shoving his burly person forward to block the other's way of escape.

"Naw; I'm jest goin' to put my brand on you."

And he supplemented his threat with a generous plastering of epithets.

"Thasso?"

A slender body leaped into action. Two fists, sharp and strong, played on Mr. Handy's red face, slashing like eagles' talons.

Mr. Handy was astounded—but Mr. Handy was game. He stood his ground, swaying under the avalanche of ripping blows.

But he realized dimly that his present position was untenable.

He must charge!

And charge he did, pawing like a maddened steer.

Curly ducked, swerved, and his slashing fists kept working briskly.

But Mr. Handy stamped on, forcing Curly toward the adobe wall. Suddenly Mr. Handy's big right hand entered the fray.

It caught the younger man in a clutching shove and knocked him against the adobe wall.

Curly reeled back. He tried to dodge, but a huge, hairy fist, well-aimed, was already speeding desperately on its way. Curly crumpled to the sand, wholly unconscious.

THROUGH puffy eyes, lidded like a sleepy robin's, Mr. Handy stared down at his victim. Then he lurched up the porch steps.

He did not hear the flying rustle of skirts behind.

Just inside the doorway of his room, he stopped. Indistinctly he could see

Remser standing at the window, gazing out.

"Oh—oh!" came Bee Wilkins's sobs from outside.

"Curly, dear, you aren't dead—are you, Curly? Curly!"

"N—no!" Curly's voice was shaky and faint.

"I'd 'a' been all right—if that—house hadn't riz up—and hit me."

"Oh, that awful big brute! Curly"—her voice rose hysterically—"I'm just sure that that horrid Mr. Remser put him up to it."

"Remser?" Curly's voice gained strength—and grimness. "Say, Bee, was Remser the one who told yuh I'd been sparkin' Juanita?"

"Yes. But I don't believe it now, Curly.

"I'm so sorry I was hasty—"

"Well, you didn't give me a chance to explain, and I got mad and left pronto. But about Juanita—ask yore pap where I was when I was supposed to be sparkin' Juanita, and he'll tell yuh I was with him fixin' some fence we happened to find open down by the big coulee. Gee, yore hand feels cool!"

"That gash in your head worries me, Curly!

"Oh, w—won't you let me call a doctor?"

"Doctor—hell!

"We don't want a doctor—we want a preacher!"

REMSER tottered from the window. When he saw the battered Mr. Handy he smiled a ghastly smile and attempted a shrug meant to register indifference.

Mechanically he drew out the magic red box and proffered it.

"Smoke, Mr. Handy?"

"Uh—uh," mumbled Mr. Handy, "don't care—if I do."



The
DESPERATE
DREAMER

By Barker Shelton

Illustrations by L. A. Beroth

IF THE PRESENT and somewhat stringent state of Duffield Ludlow's finances had brought him to the point of sacrificing the old Ludlow estate to keep himself going a little longer, it was natural he should put the disposal of the property in Hamilton Odlin's hands. Odlin was the logical real-estate man to get the best price for a parcel of property of that description.

Besides which, as an old friend of the Ludlows, and a particular crony of Duffy's dead father, Hamilton Odlin would grasp the point at once that Duffy must be in decidedly pinched straits to contemplate selling the place; that he had not reached a decision to do so without due and heart-breaking debates with himself; that he would hold off until the last possible moment, and that, therefore, the sale must needs be as expeditious as possible.

Odlin's hands were thrust into his pockets. He was tilting back in his desk

chair. Through a pair of antiquated, gold-rimmed eyeglasses, lopping downward on either side of his nose, like saddlebags on a pack-horse, two kindly eyes regarded the younger man beside him, who was fumbling in his coat pocket for a letter.

Duffy found the letter he was after, spread it out on a corner of the desk, and ran it over.

"There doesn't seem to be any other course open to me," he announced to Odlin. "I can't blame them for being sore about a dilapidated place like that in their midst up there."

He let his eyes wander down the text of the letter that so plainly disturbed him.

"'Unkempt jungle' is the way this party refers to it. Well, he's right."

"Does he mention a price?"

"He says he'd like to enter into negotiations with me concerning a transfer."

"And you think you'd better sell. It seems a very great pity," said Odlin, tak-

ing off the eye-glasses and starting a tattoo on the chair-arm with them.

"That's the way it strikes me," Duffy agreed. He said it like a man who had come to a decision through considerable mental stress, yet who intended, now that he had come to it, to stick to it.

"A Ludlow has held the title of that place for nearly three hundred years, Duffy."

"Yes. I know. I hate to think of being the cause of all those old title-holding Ludlows turning over in their graves. But I'm afraid it can't be helped."

Hamilton Odlin tilted the chair farther back. He drummed away faster with the eye-glasses on the arm of it. It was quite clear he wanted to say something and did not know how to say it.

"Duffy, you'll pardon me; it's really none of my business; put it down as the meddling of a well meaning old fuddy-dud, if you like. But haven't you been spending a great deal of money these past two years?"

"Heaps of it," Duffy admitted readily.

"I think I realize what you're trying to do. You'll do it—in time. That part doesn't worry me at all. You've got the Ludlow brilliancy, backed up by the dogged obstinacy of the Duffields. It's a combination that won't be denied—even-
tually. You are wholly satisfied this crowd you're running with will be worth to you all it is costing you, aren't you?"

"I'm after something worth while. Half-way things don't go with me. These people I'm chasing with every cent I can rake up are the kind who can throw big things my way. That's about the only way to do it. Mix with them; get them to like you, trust you, realize you could handle the business they could turn over to you. Expensive? Yes. Keeps your hair on end all the time trying to hold the pace. But I think the end justifies the means."

"Now, see here! I'm convinced it's only a question of time with you, and maybe it's a question of a very short time. How about a mortgage? I'll ar-

range a mortgage for you. You're playing for big stakes. They'll come. When they do you can clear that obligation in the shake of an eye."

Duffy gave this suggestion due consideration.

"I'm afraid I shall need more money than a mortgage would bring in. Besides the mortgage doesn't relieve me of the responsibility of fixing up the place. The grounds are a mess and the buildings even worse. I can't let things go any longer. People in the vicinity have every right in the world to howl about it. I must either put the place in shape myself, or sell out to somebody who will."

Odlin stared out the window as if he had not heard a word of what Duffy had said.

"I wonder," he said finally, "if you've ever thought of the stuff up there that wouldn't add a cent to what the place would bring if it were sold with it, but which might bring in a pretty penny if you disposed of it beforehand?"

"For instance?"

"Aren't there some old tapestries in that west front room downstairs? Remember 'em? What are they?"

"Couldn't say."

"Why not find out if they have any value? I recall some silver candlesticks and some Canton vases. Any idea how many there are?"

"Not the slightest."

"Also some manuscripts in the library. One of them is a Fenimore Cooper. Your father has shown it to me a number of times."

"I think most of the manuscripts are fragments. There are only ten pages of the Fenimore Cooper stuff. I doubt if any of them are worth much."

"We'd better be sure about it. When the old Jan Van Hook place was sold, the stuff like that—old pewter and bronzes and books and the like—brought more than the real estate did."

Odlin saw the sudden light that leaped into Duffy's eyes only to fade again almost as soon as it had come.

"There's no sense building up any hopes until we're actually sure what the things are worth," said Duffy.

"True! But if by any chance there are things of value up there we'd better know it. I'm so anxious to keep the Ludlow name on the deeds of that property I'm willing to grasp at any straw that presents itself."

"No more so than I am," Duffy told him.

"Let's run up there, Duffy. Right away! . . . How about this very evening?"

Duffy consulted a little note-book he pulled from his pocket.

"What time?"

"Say, at six?"

"That's all right for me."

"Just show up here at six, then, Duffy, and we'll run up there in the car and look things over."

THE DESCRIPTION of the old Ludlow place as an unkempt jungle in that unpleasant letter Duffy had received fitted its present fallen state all too adequately. Hamilton Odlin glanced between great stone gate-posts, where one of the heavy, rivet-studded gates lopped drunkenly and the other lay flat on the ground. The early summer evening was cloudy, threatening momentary rain, so darkness was coming on prematurely. But there was yet light enough for Odlin to see a portion of winding driveway, rapidly losing its identity under patches of coarse grass and blocked with several years' accumulation of branches fallen from the trees that lined it on either side.

Through the trees loomed the shadowy bulk of the big house, and beyond that was the river, purple-black with the reflection of the clouds and the coming darkness. On the far side of the river, lights were beginning to spring up in the dusk.

Hamilton Odlin had come to that hospitable gate a great many times in his life. He had never, in those old days, pictured it in any such condition as this.

They put the side-curtains on the car and made all snug before they started up the winding drive. The wind, which had been just enough of a breeze to make a rustling in the trees, freshened. The rustling changed with it to a swishing whine. Odlin tripped over a rambling vine that trailed a neglected length across the driveway.

"'Jungle' is right," he grunted, recovering his balance with more or less impromptu pantomime.

They came to the door of the rear porch. The rain began streaking down in business-like fashion. Duffy drew forth a bunch of keys, separated the one for that particular door from its neighbors, and slipped it into the lock. He seemed to encounter trouble with the key.

"No wonder it fussed me," he complained. "It wasn't locked at all. I was in a fearful hurry the last time I ran out here."

"When was that?" Odlin asked.

"Nearly six months ago."

The damp, musty breath of things molding and things decaying rushed upon them.

"Cheerful sort of tomb on a night like this, eh?" said Odlin.

Duffy sniffed the dead air of the place. "Let's get some windows open first thing," he urged.

He produced a flash from his pocket and lighted the way. The floor of the kitchen they entered was slippery with moisture. They went through a long butler's pantry to the dining-room. Dead leaves rustled underfoot, blown in through a window where a shutter had fallen off and several of the panes were shattered.

They opened windows right and left. Gusty draughts of the wet night air grappled with the stale odors of must and mold and drove them hence, or at least smothered them for the time being.

There was a silver candelabrum on the mantelpiece with half-burned candles still in the five sockets. Duffy lighted them,

and he and Odlin set out on their tour of inspection. But the tapestries in that west front room proclaimed all too loudly their own lack of value, even to eyes as inexpert as theirs, and Canton vases and silver candlesticks made but a sorry showing when they had gathered together all they could find; and anything else of particular value either never was or else had disappeared long since.

"A useless errand; more so than I thought it would be," Duffy muttered.

"There's the library to look over," Odlin sought to bolster up their waning hopes.

"As useless as the rest of it," Duffy expressed his belief. "I hardly think I care to paw over any more clammy things tonight. Go ahead, if you feel like it. I prefer to stay here and look out the window."

ODLIN took the candelabrum and left him there by one of the long windows. He stood there, looking out at the leaf-littered front porch with its great white pillars, and the lights of an occasional craft, blurred in the rain, poking up or down the river at the foot of the slope. He could hear Odlin moving about in the library just beyond. And presently Odlin was calling to him:

"Will you step in here just a minute?"

Duffy stepped to the doorway. The difference between that library and the rest of the empty house struck him with a forcefulness that was almost a shock. The exact nature of that difference he could not determine in that first quick glance. But there was a vast difference; all the difference between the living and the dead.

Dust was here as elsewhere, and the smell of moldy things. But the place gave the impression of being picked up, ordered, livable and—lived in. The table was cleared of the jumbled litter he remembered was on it the last time he saw it. Now it showed only a low reading-lamp and two books face down near it, as if they had been left there by someone stepping out of the room for a moment,

to be picked up again as soon as that someone returned. Close to the table was an easy chair with cushions piled in it, and a similar chair bore a freight of pillows near the hearth. On the hearth itself lay poker and bellows, dropped at one side of it in a way that spoke eloquently of a fire that wouldn't behave itself. A log, charred through, slumped in the middle, rested on the andirons, and beneath it a little pile of the gray-white ashes that burned paper leaves as its corpse.

Duffy went to the table. He picked up those face down books. One was the "Meditations of Marcus Aurelius"; the other was a volume of Rossetti's poems. Odlin, watching him closely, came nearer with his high-held candles.

"So you run out here occasionally and hang about a little for old sake's sake, eh?" he inquired. He seemed rather pleased at the thought of Duffy in that rôle.

"I? As I tell you, I haven't been here for six months. Hang about here with every last thing in the place howling accusations at me? Not I, Odlin!"

"If you haven't been loafing about here yourself, Duffy, then someone is making free with your property, that's all. Look at those ashes. Are they fresh, or aren't they?"

DUFFY bent down to the fireplace. The ashes undoubtedly were fresh. He prodded a finger into them. They rustled softly. Old ashes would never have rustled in that manner. They would have been matted down, soggy with the seep from the chimney.

"I'd report this to the authorities at the village, if I were you," Odlin said. "Have them keep an eye out in this vicinity. You don't care to have somebody poking about the house whenever he chooses."

"I don't know. If anyone wants to come here and read Marcus Aurelius and Rossetti, perhaps he should be encouraged."



"For one irresolute moment she stood there with the full light of the flames upon her."

"He might get careless with his matches and his fire. I presume, like too many other people, you haven't increased your insurance on the place to meet the increased cost of building these days."

Duffy admitted he hadn't.

"It might be a good idea to stick around for a little while and try to have a look at this bird," Odlin suggested. "There are certain bits of evidence that seem to point to the fact that he is coming here pretty regularly."

"Not a wholly bad idea! We'll do it. Breaking and entering for the sake of reading in a musty old library arouses my curiosity. But if we expect this uninvited guest of ours to show himself, we'd better put out these lights, and you'd better get the car away from the gate."

Odlin went out to run the car farther down the road. Duffy put out the lights. Very softly he moved about in the darkness closing all the windows they had opened. The rain was coming in intermittent showers; but when it did come young cloud-bursts roared away on the leaky tin roofs of the bay windows and porches.

Odlin came back fairly dry. He had ducked out and back again between showers.

"He comes in that back door," Odlin declared. "That's why you found it unlocked. Then he passes through the kitchen and dining-room, and enters the library through this door."

"No doubt. That means we'd better do our spying from this spot," Duffy said, indicating the room just beyond the library.

There were heavy portieres at the door between the two rooms. They draped them carefully so that, concealed themselves, they yet had a good view of the entire library. They drew up comfortable chairs.

They waited an hour in vain.

Another of those cloudbursts began to pound and roar outside. A trickle of water, seeping through the ceiling, dripped down the back of Odlin's neck. He moved

his chair away from the miniature cascade.

"Confound a man that let's his property get into such shape!" he exploded.

"No one in his right senses will be poking about tonight," said Duffy. "Even if we were in for our little party, the rain has surely gummied it now. Let's get out of here. If we're still curious we can come out again some more propitious evening."

BUT as if in denial of Duffy's words, there came from the back of the house a sound that was surely no scraping of a limb or banging of a loose shutter this time. Rusty hinges squeaked as the back door opened, and snarled as it was banged shut. The portieres close to the two waiting men flapped a moment in the draught and then hung limply and inertly in place again. Footsteps crossed the kitchen. Some one fumbled about the library.

Then there followed a great crumpling and tearing of newspapers. A match rasped and sputtered. Its feeble halo threw into relief a figure kneeling at the fireplace. The match flame crept towards the crumpled newspapers. There was a roar in the chimney throat. The room was filled with light.

Duffy Ludlow clutched hard at the arms of his chair.

"Good God!" he said aloud in his surprise.

For there, kneeling before the fire, was a girl, in a gray raincoat, the raindrops glistening upon it like so many jewels in the flare of the burning newspapers.

At the sound of that startled exclamation that had slipped involuntarily from Duffy, she sprang up. For one irresolute moment she stood there with the full light of the flames upon her. Duffy had a somewhat confused but strangely clear-cut glimpse of a small, decidedly pretty face; big, frightened eyes; a shapely chin, and a mass of brown hair with a very plain, but very smart and up-to-date, little hat crowning it.

JUST that one tense moment she stood there in the firelight. Then, as if the worst must be known and faced, she made straight for the portieres, behind which Duffy and Odlin sat.

Duffy scrambled out of his chair. So did Odlin. As quietly as he could possibly manage it, Duffy slipped back the portieres before she reached the door. The girl retreated in great confusion, bumped against the table, and clung hard to its edge with both hands.

"Oh-h-h-h!" she said, as if that one word were sapping all the breath in her slight body.

The flare of the newspapers she had lighted in the fireplace spent itself. Darkness shut in again.

And in the dark the girl's voice again uttered that distressed:

"Oh-h-h-h!"

"Please, please don't be alarmed!" said Duffy with all the reassurance he could put into his voice. "We're human, and very decent individuals, I'm sure; and—and very sorry we have frightened you like this. Light the candles, will you, Odlin?"

But Odlin couldn't seem to locate the candelabrum; so Duffy struck a match and lighted the candles himself. The soft glow of light fell upon the girl, still clinging to the table edge. She faced the two men bravely enough, but her eyes kept turning towards the door of the dining-room, as if she were estimating the distance from the table to it, and how quickly she could cover that distance if she made a break for it.

"We're really horribly upset about startling you," said Duffy. "You see, we weren't expecting it would be a woman."

She was having a great deal of difficulty with her breathing. Also she seemed trying to find something to say—anything to say that would show them she wasn't at all afraid.

"Do you gentlemen own this house?" she asked, and a little pause between each word told of the effort it cost her to speak.

"This gentleman does," said Odlin, indicating Duffy.

The color which had gone out of her face began to come back. It came back rather too thoroughly.

"How in the world will I ever explain being here at all . . . like this . . . having you find me here?" she said, as if she were speaking as much or more to herself as to them. "How can I ever make you believe any explanation I try to give you?"

DUFFY LUDLOW looked at the girl clinging to his library table, and at the face-down books just behind her. She was very pretty, and frightened, and bewildered—and alone.

"Suppose we accept that explanation before you give it," he suggested firmly, as if he had thought it all over and had come to the conclusion that this was the only respectable course open to him.

"But you don't know me, nor who I am," she protested. "Surely, I'm the one to apologize and explain, and then leave, not you."

"It doesn't make any difference who you are," said Duffy. "I'm somehow sure it's all right."

Odlin, beside him, favored Duffy with one of those covert nudges that urge a man, when open admonition is out of the question, not to be a fool. Duffy did not pay the slightest attention to it.

"I've got to explain for my own sake," said she.

Odlin seemed to consider himself much the better qualified of the two men to handle the situation. The Ludlows, as he well knew, always were susceptible; and the girl was the very kind to appeal unconsciously to such susceptibility. Odlin, quite plainly, was strong for the explanation she mentioned.

"You live here, in this vicinity?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I don't *live* anywhere at present. I *exist* in a rented room in town. I work in the office of a law-firm."

"I think we have made this lady trou-

ble enough for one evening," Duffy interrupted her. "Are you coming with me, Odlin?"

"Not quite yet," said Odlin with a firmness that matched the younger man's.

"Please stay," said the girl, turning to Duffy. She began speaking very rapidly, as if she were afraid he would go before he had heard what she had to tell:

"Early in the Spring I came out here one Sunday afternoon for a ramble. I poked through these grounds. And I walked all round the house. The back door had blown open. I came in. I knew I shouldn't do it, but something stronger than any moral sense of what I should do or shouldn't do took me through that door. I was homesick . . . for a house that is very much like this one."

SHE PAUSED. She seemed doubtful that either of the two men before her would believe what she was saying. Duffy was quick to notice this.

"This is getting mighty interesting," he encouraged her to go on. "A house like this, and you were homesick for it, you say."

"That was what made me come in that first afternoon. I was just plain, horribly homesick the minute I saw this house. You see, I own a half-interest in a house that is awfully like it; square and old, with the same sort of white pillars on the front porch and the same sort of solid old shutters; and . . . pardon me! . . . going to seed and run down just as this place is."

"If it's gone down hill anything like this place you have my sympathy," said Duffy with a sigh.

"It isn't . . . your pardon again! . . . quite so far gone. But it's pretty bad. It belongs equally to my Aunt Marcia and to me. We are the only two descendants left of all the family. You know they used to build great arks of houses, and forget to leave any money to the heirs, who followed them, to keep the place up. That's what happened in our

case. The house came to us . . . just the house; not enough else to shingle it or paint it or fix the chimneys when they began to crumble."

"Is it a house near here?" Odlin inquired.

Duffy glared at him, as if the question was ill-timed and immaterial, anyway. But the girl smiled at Odlin and shook her head and sighed.

"It's a long way from here," she told him. "I don't see it often. Once a year, for the two, little, short weeks of my vacation; that's all. No," she was speaking to Duffy again now, "they didn't leave us any money; and Aunt Marcia had to work at her dressmaking to keep things going. I wasn't very much help to her, because I'm not clever with a needle. So I came away to work, and help out that way. I do manage to send back the taxes each year and enough to stop the worst holes in the roof. But that's about all I can do."

"I'm mighty glad you did come in here that day," said Duffy. "You came on my invitation. I give it to you now with the date duly set back."

"Thank you! That's fearfully nice of you," she said with a smile of gratitude he liked immensely. "With or without that invitation, I came here that day, as I've said, and I poked through the rooms. They are much larger than ours, yet they make you think of the rooms in our house. And I planned how they might be fixed up if I had the money to do it. It was a wonderful afternoon. I pretended this was our house. I could do it without half trying. I pretended I was home with a young fortune that somehow I'd made. And I went through all the rooms and planned new decorations and furnishings. And then I read a while here in the library. And I built a fire, and picked up the room a little, and later I went out on the porch and watched the boats going up and down the river. It reminded me of Sandy Bay. That house of ours, you see, is close to Sandy Bay. You can sit on the front porch and watch the fish-

ing-craft and the coasting schooners and the tugs with their tows of barges going past.

"So the river and the boats on it easily became Sandy Bay to me, and I was home again.

"I've been coming out here two or three times a week ever since. I'd come out here and read and dream and poke about the house and have a fire out of the wood that's fallen off the trees. I'm always dreaming of making enough money sometime to fix up that house for Aunt Martha and myself just as we want it. I'm a desperate dreamer, you see. Then I'd walk over to Fisherville and take the late train back. That's all. That's the explanation I wanted you to have. I'll go now."

"Oh, no you won't," said Duffy.

She nodded her head emphatically.

"And never come again," she said. "But before I go I ought to settle for the wood I've burned. Wood is worth a lot of money these days, and I've been pretty prodigal with it. Maybe, too, I should pay what I can for using the place as I have."

Duffy was looking at her with an understanding smile. Another don't-be-a-fool prod from Odlin missed its purpose.

"I'd like you to make payment for the wood you have burned by burning more of it," said Duffy. "Also, you can repay me best for whatever you have done to my house by continuing to come here as you have been doing quite as often as you like."

Her eyes widened and brightened; then they dimmed a little.

"Why, how perfectly splendid of you! But I don't believe I can."

"I never come here," said Duffy. "No one ever comes here. If this old rack and ruin of a place can do anybody any good at all, I shall be mighty happy about it. I'll just leave word with the proper authorities at the village that any prowlers there might be around here are to be kept away from this place and that you are not to be disturbed."

"It's a dreadful temptation you're offering me."

"Yield to it," he advised her. "I'll build you a real fire before we go."

SHE seemed doubtful about accepting this offer. Duffy went out. He gathered up a goodly pile of fallen limbs. When he came back with them the girl had unbuttoned the raincoat and was fumbling at the pins of her hat. She was smiling and flushing.

"Really, I oughtn't to think of it for a minute," she still hesitated. "But when you're homesick and living in a four-dollar-and-a-half room—"

"You're perfectly justified," Duffy finished the sentence for her.

He started a roaring fire. He pulled the big chair to the hearth and arranged the pillows. He placed the two volumes on the nearest corner of the table, pulled the lamp beside them, and started to light it.

But it struck him the picture would not be so effective with the lamp lighted.

"Won't you let us see you here in front of the fire before we go?" he asked.

Flushing somewhat more, the girl settled herself in the chair. She thrust out her little muddy shoes to the blaze. She reached for the volume of Rosetti. Duffy was wholly satisfied with the picture she made there.

"Good-night, Miss Desperate Dreamer!" he said. "Come on, Odlin!"

"It's awfully queer how this has turned out," she said. "I don't feel quite right about it, but I'm fearfully comfortable, and—and grateful and appreciative, all the same—and . . . good-night!"

"Well, you're a Ludlow, all right," said Odlin as the back door closed behind them.

THEY STUMBLED down the branch-strewn driveway to the road. Another of the intermittent showers broke loose. They buttoned the curtains tightly and started homeward through the blinding downpour.

"Funny little girl, wasn't she?" said Duffy musingly at last.

"Very quaint."

"Alone in that old ark, and liking it, and dreaming her dreams!"

"'Old ark' is the point of your remarks I'm inclined to elaborate upon a little," said Odlin. "Look here, Don Quixote or Mr. Good Samaritan, or whatever you choose to call yourself, it's all very well to turn the house over to the lady, but, like most of your ilk, while you're well-meaning you're rankly impracticable. You shouldn't have encouraged her to go there. She'll catch her never-get-over some fine evening in that leaky old shack."

"That roof is pretty much of a sieve, isn't it? Ought to be fixed right away, that's a fact. I believe I'll have it done."

"That's quite a roof, son. I gathered from your remarks this morning and from your general attitude that you were all-fired hard up."

"Aren't there people who do that sort of work and let the place stand good for it until you can pay them?"

"There are."

Odlin, pretending to squint his eyes as he peered forward at the road, was really endeavoring to hide a smile of amusement.

"But if you wanted to sell, that might result in) awkward complications. We might get a good customer and find that the firm who had fixed your roof for you had become tired of waiting for you to come across with the amount of their bill and had tied you up with a lien."

"I'm not thinking of selling right away."

"No?"

"I think I'd like the little lady to have the use of the place for a while and dream a few more of her dreams there. It wouldn't be very hospitable, now would it, Odlin, to offer her the use of the house and then promptly turn round and sell it? And if I'm not going to sell, that roof must be fixed at once or it will be dropping in."

"I should imagine leaks would be

rather fatal to dreams," said Odlin, squinting harder through the blurred glass of the wind-shield.

Duffy did some deep thinking.

"I'm going to hunt up some business with real and immediate returns to it," he announced. "I think I'd like to fix up the old place quite a bit while I'm at it."

"Go to it, Duffy! I'm glad to hear you talk that way!"

"I'll have to stop the yowls of the neighboring property owners. Those grounds are certainly one mess. Where'll I find a good gardener to trim up the trees and clean out the underbrush and get some flower-beds started?"

"You must be counting on a whole lot of that immediate business."

"I am. Got to have it, Odlin."

DUFFY proceeded to put his radically altered plan of life into effect at once. That was Duffy Ludlow all over. If he made up his mind to do a thing, he wasted no time thinking further about it. He did it. Just now he needed money and needed it at once. So he went after it. He went after it hard.

The old crowd he had run about with, whose favor he had sought by mixing with them, now knew him no more. Whenever any of them called him up he was invariably busy. And strangely enough—yet not so strange, either, in a cold analysis of it—the business from them he had hounded fruitlessly heretofore began to come to him. It piled up, bit by bit, on the other business with immediate returns he was going after night and main.

Duffy, in fact, found himself very presently on the jump early and late, with money coming in from all sides. It had to come that way if he was to keep his head above water with the load he was carrying. Things were happening fast at the old Ludlow place up the river. The grounds were being put in shape; a gang of men were at work on the outside of the house, and Duffy was making ar-

rangements with certain decorators and furnishers for necessary work to be done on the inside.

Naturally, with all this going on, it was perfectly reasonable for Duffy to run up to the old place frequently. He always went in the evening. For one thing, he wanted to be sure the village authorities were keeping away all prowlers as he had stipulated. But when he got out there it was neither the chance of prowlers nor the improvements on the place that seemed to interest him most. From a certain perch on the boundary wall he could see into the library, if it was lighted. The real reason for his presence in the vicinity was explained by the way he watched those library windows on nights when they showed lights.

He was always very cautious when he crept to his favorite perch on the boundary wall. He was quite sure the lady within the house had no idea he ever sat thus on that wall.

SO IT WAS a vast surprise to him one evening as he entered the grounds to find her waiting for him just inside the big gates, and very apparently expecting him at about that hour. Plainly there was something on her mind that had to be said to him.

"You're spending an awful lot of money on the place," she said, and she seemed somewhat troubled about it.

"You see it had to be fixed up or cave in," he told her.

"Would you have done all this just the same if I hadn't appropriated your property as I did?"

"The people in the neighborhood have been howling about this jungle in their midst. Something had to be done at once. While I was about it, it was better to do the thing right. There'll be decorators and people to look after the new furnishings out here next week. I hope they won't upset the place too much. Don't let them disturb you. They'll get after the library last of all."

"You're going to let the decorators and

furnishers do it just as they see fit?" she asked . . . and there was just a hint of reproach in her voice.

"Why, no! I have some few ideas of my own. I'm open to suggestions. What would you do with that front room just beyond the library, for instance?"

She told him eagerly how she would have that particular room refurnished, and what she would do with the halls and the dining-room and the rooms upstairs.

And there under the trees he listened, and made notes of her suggestions on the backs of several old envelopes.

"What will you do with it when it is done?" she asked.

There had to be some adequate reason for spending all the money he was pouring out so prodigally on the place.

"I intend to rent it," he said. "In the meantime, until it is rented, you'll keep on using the place such evenings and Sundays as you choose, won't you?"

"I'm afraid I shan't have the courage not to come," she said with an odd little laugh. "I'll be so anxious to see the rooms when they are done. It will be like having all the dreams I've ever dreamed about the place Aunt Marcia and I own coming true under my eyes."

THREE successive nights Duffy had been out to the place, and for three successive nights it had been dark and empty. This was disturbing, he found—much more disturbing than he could have imagined. On the fourth night, when he found everything dark and still, he went to the front porch to watch the lights on the river and to find out definitely a few things about himself.

He did not watch the lights as he had intended to do, but he did find out definitely quite a few things about himself.

Also, about the time he admitted certain things to himself and faced them with a great deal of satisfaction, his eyes fell upon a bit of paper, fluttering a summons to him on the front door. He struck a match and another and another.



"'Yes, I am Aunt Marcia,' she admitted with a slight inclination of the gray head."

and held them close to the bit of paper as he read:

"Thank you for the use of your house, Mr. Ludlow, and for all your thoughtfulness since I have been coming here; and for the way you have followed every suggestion I made about the furnishings and decorations of the rooms.

"It has all made me realize how it would be if my own desperate dreams were fulfilled; but it has also made me realize how utterly desperate those dreams of mine are. I'd have to fix up our house just like this one, if I ever fixed it up at all, and I never could hope to make money enough to do that.

"So, I've given up the ghost. I'm going back—not for two weeks this time, but forever and always. I'll work with Aunt Marcia, even if I'm not much of a dressmaker. I'll do the best I can. And we'll enjoy that house as it is, and manage to stop the worst of the leaks, perhaps, and keep the taxes paid, until we are forced to sell it or it caves in on us.

"But thank you again for letting me see what my dreams meant, and that I couldn't have them come true. And for all your kindness and understanding from the first!"

There was no signature appended. He scorched his finger-tips with flaming matches as he read the note again. By overdoing things he had undone everything. He had a sudden feeling of being very much alone in the middle of a desert. The only oasis on his horizon seemed to be the fact that there was a house going to ruin on the shores of Sandy Bay—wherever that might be.

THE TITLE of a piece of property he was handling being somewhat unpleasantly involved, Hamilton Odlin went over to Duffy Ludlow's office to see if Duffy couldn't straighten matters out for him a little. He found Duffy very busy; but not in the usual way. Duffy was immersed in guide-books and maps. He listened to Odlin's troubles with the involved title.

"That would take a lot of time," he said. "I couldn't do anything about it just now. I'm going away."

"Going away, Duffy? Where?"

"Sandy Bay."

"And where might Sandy Bay be?"

"I don't know," said Duffy, and fell upon another guide-book.

Odlin looked sadly puzzled.

"You see," Duffy went on, "there are Sandy Bays scattered all up and down the coast. I want a Sandy Bay where there are old houses, like that one of mine, hard by."

Odlin seemed more puzzled than ever.

"It concerns the little lady we found out at the house that night," Duffy explained. "She's been going there regularly ever since. But she's not going there again. She's departed for Sandy Bay for good."

"Is that a tragedy, Duffy?"

"Just the end of the world. That's all."

Odlin did some meditating.

"I was about to suggest," said he, "that you thank your stars she came along to arouse the Duffield grit in you by appealing to your Ludlow susceptibility. She's done wonders for you in that way. The old place is certainly looking itself again, and you've got a flourishing practice under way. Yes, I was about to suggest you thank your stars she came along as she did; and then forget her—but then, perhaps I'd better not offer the last suggestion."

"Wouldn't do any good," said Duffy, spreading out a folding map in the guide-book and following a ragged coast line with his finger.

"If you've got to find this particular Sandy Bay, Duffy, someone familiar with the coast might help you. Possibly at one of the shipping offices——"

Duffy forsook the guide-book for the telephone and presently was talking with a coastwise shipping-office.

"That was a bright idea of yours," he announced as he finished speaking and hung up the receiver. "There's a Sandy Bay on the Maine coast that seems mighty hopeful. Sorry I can't get after that title for you at present. But you see how it is."

"I think I do," said Odlin.

THERE WERE three villages on the shore of the particular Sandy Bay Duffy Ludlow had pounced upon. Two of them were without a clue of the kind he sought. But the third village he poked through was more like it. There was a steep bank sloping down to the shore, and old, square houses lining the top of that slope. One of them had a porch with white pillars. The house needed paint. While it was not amazingly like his own house on the river, there were certain similar lines about it; sufficiently similar to induce Duffy to turn into the gate. It was late afternoon. A woman with gray hair was pruning a rose bush.

She turned as Duffy came up. He liked her face.

"Pardon me, but isn't this—isn't this—"

It seemed mighty queer to say the only name by which he knew her, but he said it.

"Isn't this Aunt Marcia?"

The lady's face was even more likeable when she smiled in amusement.

"Yes, I am Aunt Marcia," she admitted with a slight inclination of the gray head. "To everybody in this vicinity," she added.

"Is—is—"

There he was, stalled again! He couldn't very well ask if the Desperate Dreamer was at home.

"Is your niece here?" he finally got out.

The lady with the gray hair seemed to place him at once; to know him without a moment's hesitation.

"This is Mr. Ludlow, isn't it?" she said. "Won't you come into the house?"

Duffy found himself walking beside her towards the porch.

"My niece's name," she told him with a twinkle in her eyes, "is Ruth Deming. I am Miss Marcia Crosby."

"You seemed to know me, Miss Crosby," he said with evident satisfaction that such was the case.

"I've heard your name quite often of late," she said.

She ushered him into a hall. It was big and dim and cool. A beautiful old staircase went up to a wide landing and turned to the left.

"Ruth!" Miss Crosby called up the staircase. There was a rustling on the floor above. A door opened. Footsteps crossed the upper hallway.

"There are my rose bushes waiting for me," said Aunt Marcia. "I must get them pruned before dark."

"Thank you!" said Duffy, feeling immediately thereafter that he had said a very queer thing, but that the lady, slipping out to the porch, would not lay it up against him.

THE lady of the desperate dreams, the little lady he had watched so many evenings through the library windows of the old Ludlow house, was coming down the stairs. The hall was very dim. He stepped eagerly forward. She stopped short. She caught the bannister rail.

"Well!" she said. He wholly approved of the way she said it.

"How do you do?" said Duffy. He hadn't meant to say anything of the sort.

"Why are you here?"

They both knew well enough the answer to that superfluous question, but Duffy felt the need of saying something.

"I've come to fix up another old house," said he.

She came down one more step and halted again.

"You see, I've got the habit," he explained.

"What will you do with the other house you've fixed up, then?"

"We'll live in it part of the time, you and I and Aunt Marcia; and we'll live here the rest of the time."

HE HELD out his arms. He smiled as if everything was settled most satisfactorily. Apparently it was, for she came down the rest of the stairs in a fine hurry.

"MO' RAIN—MO' RES"

"Two large, thoroughly competent-looking feet rested on top of the counter."



By Edgar Valentine Smith

Illustrations by T. Wyatt Nelson

PANKETY-PANK-PANK! Ety-pank-pank!" Mr. Nesby Thaggard sluggishly strummed his banjo. His posture was suggestive of a man of leisure—of leisure and affluence. The small of his back nestled luxuriously into the cushioned seat of the spacious rocking chair; two large, thoroughly competent-looking feet rested on top of the counter that ran around three sides of the little store.

One of them was keeping time to the intermittent "pank-panking" of the banjo.

From time to time Mr. Thaggard permitted his glance to rove, with an air of indolent proprietorship, about the confines of the shop. His eyes rested contentedly upon the rows and rows of neatly pyramided canned goods; upon the barrels and bins of flour and meal and other staple groceries; his gaze took in the

cartons of plain and fancy cakes and crackers, and the tastefully arranged display of toothsome jellies and preserves. Then he cocked an eye toward the rudely lettered sign upon the show window:

JULY JOHNSON
Plane and Fancy
Groseris

He sighed complacently and resumed his indolent strumming, suspending operations at intervals, however, to nod. He had just finished a hearty noonday meal, which, on a hot, humid August day, is conducive to somnolence. Consequently, in between snatches of more or less recognizable jazz, Mr. Thaggard courted slumber.

The deep, booming bass note of a saw-mill whistle far away on Chilkasabogue roused him momentarily. He shrugged his disgust.

The whistle was a call to—to labor after the luncheon hour. At intervals of a few seconds, other factories joined in the summons. He heard them all through patiently before he gave voice to his emotions.

The sweltering summer heat, together with his natural inclination, was not promotive of any useless display of energy.

"Bear down, ole whistles, bear down!" he yawned, as the last, lingering note died out. Ain't none o' you namin' my name!"

A moment later, his head tilted slowly rearward until it touched the back of his chair; his hands slid from the banjo; the instrument, released, glided, with a dull "punk," to the floor. Mr. Nesby Thaggard slumbered.

It was perhaps well enough for his peace of mind that he had lapsed into unconsciousness. For in the rear of the store, in the apartment occupied by the Nesby Thaggards, he was, at the moment, the subject of a highly acrimonious debate.

Rather, it was a one-sided conversation in which his bride of a month, July Thaggard, *née* Johnson, was on the receiving end of a heated monologue being delivered by her aunt, Mrs. Johnson, none other.

"Honey chile," the latter was saying, "I been stan'in' it fo' a week, an' I can't remain silence no longer. Here I goes to spen' a mont' wid my sister in Gu'fpo't, an' what does I fin' when I gets back? 'At insignif'git li'l Burninham banjo buzzard done tuck an' got hisse'f ma'ied to you! An', f'um all I been able to learn, he ain't done nary lick o' work since de ce'mony. I been watchin' close fo' de las' seb'm days—ever since I got home—an' if he's done anything but eat an' sleep an' scratch 'at banjo's back, I ain't seed it."

She paused for a moment. It was perfectly plain that Mrs. Johnson was beginning to become peeved. July contributed a tired "Yassum," as her share of the conversation and decided to let it go at that.

"Now understan', chile," Mrs. Johnson went on, after a moment, "I ain't aimin' to be low-ratin' you none. But, I can't he'p f'um risin' to remark 'at if you was lookin' fo' nuthin' when you puck out a husban' you sho' mus' a went to de bargain countuh!"

"Ya-yassum!"

"Is he ever done any kine o' work a-tall?"

"I—I don't know'm. He's been kine o' back'ards 'bout talkin' 'bout work. But, so fur, he ain't never 'zibited de disposition of a ram-pant workin' man."

"Huh!"

Mrs. Johnson sniffed ominously.

"Well . . . if he continues to keep on hangin' 'roun' heah, he's mo'n ap' to fin' hisse'f subject to a change o' disposition!"

JULY, though, was loyal. It was only the forceful, dominant personality of her aunt, which had always overawed her, that kept her from coming out boldly in defense of the recently annexed

Nesby. As it was, she tried to change the drift of Mrs. Johnson's thought.

"Wonder where he went?" she said musingly.

"*Went?*" Mrs. Johnson snorted. "Did you said '*went*'? He ain't *went* nowheres! 'At insect ain't one o' de wentin' kin'. He's mos' prob'ly out in de sto', dere, fas' asleep."

She moved toward the connecting door.

"Le's see!"

Poised in the doorway, she beckoned silently to July. The latter tip-toed up. "Look!" Mrs. Johnson commanded in a whisper.

"An' listen!"

They both looked and listened. Sight and sound proved too much for Mrs. Johnson. Nesby Thaggard, snoring contentedly away, while other men toiled at their daily tasks of earning a livelihood, was more than she could stand. She lost all sense of self-restraint. Casting her glance about for a suitable weapon, her eyes lighted presently upon a stout barrel-stave.

Mrs. Johnson seized this and started ominously in the direction of the unsuspecting Nesby. July followed, tugging at her sleeve.

"Aun'ie," she whispered pleadingly, "don't hit 'im—pleas'm!"

Mrs. Johnson hesitated, and hesitating, was lost. Softened by the entreaty, she forebore to assault her sleeping nephew-in-law. Instead she crept up softly alongside him. Then, swinging the stave overhead, she brought it down, flatwise, on top of the counter with a resounding "*wham!*"

The effect that the noise produced was instantaneous. Nesby Thaggard, just a moment before a happy-go-lucky adventurer in dreamland, found himself suddenly sprawled ungracefully, half-awake, upon the floor. Each individual muscle in his body had responded with cataclysmic force and effect to the sound occasioned by the impact of stave with counter top. He gazed stupidly, first at

his wife, and then into Mrs. Johnson's forbidding visage.

After a moment, he grinned sheepishly.

"Huh! I mus' a been dreamin'!"

"*Y-e-a-h?*"

There was acidity in Mrs. Johnson's tone.

"You wasn't by no mischance dreamin' 'bout goin' to work, was you?"

"Naw'm! I don't 'zackly 'member—"

"I didn't think so. You looked happy!"

Nesby had risen to his feet. Now, he sought once more the comforts of the rocking chair. He yawned as he eased himself into its welcoming depths.

Mrs. Johnson, turning to resume the household duties with July, delivered a scornful, parting shot over her shoulder.

"Reckin it was lucky you was woke up. Wid yo' feets h'isted as high as you had 'em, dey was danger o' yo' brains runnin' down into yo' haid!"

AS THE TWO WOMEN passed into the rear of the building, Nesby's brow clouded with ponderous thought. He could not but realize that a certain significance—a certain dire significance—lay hidden somewhere in the conversation which had just taken place. He lapsed into painful meditation. Mrs. Johnson's words, though few in number, made up in meaning what they lacked in multitude. There was no doubt about it. The woman was contemplating work—for him. Work! Leisure devastating, pleasure destroying work! He shuddered at the thought.

The ever present menace of work as a means of passing the time away, so he ruminated now, was the one contributing factor in his departure from the roof tree of his uncle, Milo Sloper, in Birmingham—and incidentally, from the city itself—some weeks previous. Ever since he could remember, Uncle Milo had been given to the enunciation of certain weird ideas in regard to the uplifting and edifying qualities of labor. In vindication of his theories it was his custom to point proudly to himself as an example of what unremitting personal association with

work could accomplish. Nor was he without justification—for Milo Sloper was prosperous. He had amassed a moderate competence.

The thought of prosperity as a concrete thing was not, of itself, distasteful to Nesby.

It was only when his Uncle Milo stressed the fact that opulence lay somewhere near the other end of a road that was mighty rough, mighty rocky, and mighty hard to travel, that he became, figuratively speaking, gun-shy.

Not that he always loafed. He had, at times, formed more or less intimate connections with jobs of varying degrees of brevity. In between these strictly flirtatious attachments upon his part, which was about ninety-seven per cent of the time, he had been accustomed to look to his uncle for bed and board. For years Uncle Milo put up with it, his objections being suggested, rather than outspoken. But there came a time when Nesby awoke to the dawning of his twenty-first birthday. It was after they had finished their breakfast upon this memorable occasion that the fiat went forth. Uncle Milo proceeded to lay down the law.

"Boy," he began, without any introductory remarks, "you was bawn on a Sunday—de day o' res—an' to my certain knowledge you's been thinkin' ev'ry day was yo' birthday since den."

He paused for a moment, and cleared his throat.

"Ain't you mos' due fo' some kind o' change?"

Nesby had sensed the seriousness of his uncle's tone, and attempted to divert his thoughts by feeble levity.

"Change?" he grinned weakly. "Did you said 'change,' Unc' Milo? Yassuh, I's always ready to accep' any li'l change you feels like pryin' yo'se'f loose f'um."

Uncle Milo glowered.

"Wipec' at grin offen 'em features, boy! You's goin' to get de change, all right! All yo' life you's been dwellin' in a lan' flowin' wid milk an' honey. But you's

facin' a long, dry drouth, if you don't mend yo' ways!"

By way of reply, Nesby didn't; he maintained a discreet silence.

"How long it been," Uncle Milo resumed, "since you exposed yo'se'f to work?"

Nesby heartened a bit. His face cleared.

"Why, Unc' Milo," he put in eagerly, "I had me a job on'y las' mont', an'—"

"You did!" his uncle exploded disgustfully. "You did fo' two whole days han'-runnin'!"

"—an' I'd be workin' right now, scusin' de fack 'at I's aillin'!"

"Ailin' how?"

"I—I feels jes' like I mought have asteroids in my th'roat."

IN OTHER DAYS Milo Sloper had been an unlicensed, untutored, but fairly successful, country veterinarian. He got up from the table and walked around to his nephew.

"I has stopped de blin' staggers in hawsses," he said, "an' chol'ry in hawgs. Open yo' mouf an' le' me see!"

Nesby did as he was commanded. Uncle Milo, at a safe distance, peered into the cavernous depths. He shook his head grimly.

"Can't see nothin' wrong," was his judgment. "But—I ain't goin' to be hasty. Come on!"

Unresistingly—for deep in his heart Nesby had the fear of Milo Sloper—he followed his uncle to the nearest physician's office. The doctor announced that he could find no trace of asteroids. At Uncle Milo's direction, he then made a thorough physical examination of the young man. His pronouncement was that the subject was as fit as a fiddle.

Grimly Milo Sloper led the way home. There, seated upon the front porch, he loosed his ultimatum briefly and pointedly.

"You's heard de doctor's verdick. Now you goin' to listen at mine. No work: no vittles and clo'es!"

Nesby offered no comment.

"An 'at's on'y part of it," his uncle continued relentlessly. "Nex' time you comes 'roun' dis house, less'n you's formed a puhmanent 'tachment to a stiddy job, us ain't goin' to ahgue de question no mo'. Us goin' to ahbitrate."

"Ahbitrate?"

Nesby glanced uneasily at the other.

"How you mean ahbitrate, Unc' Milo?"

"Wait!"

Uncle Milo stepped off the low porch and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Then when he came in sight again, his right hand grasped a pick handle.

"Fo' my pah't," he said grimly, "I's goin' to ahbitrate wid dis!"

Nesby shied. The mere intimation that such a primitive method of settling their differences might be brought into use held no appeal for him. He edged his chair nervously a little further away from that of his uncle.

"Ner 'at ain' all, neether," Uncle Milo went on. "If you stays anywhere in Burnin'ham, you works. I's goin' to keep info'med on yo' conduct, an' if you loafs I reports you to de po-lices fo' fragrancy."

With that, Uncle Milo, caressing the pick handle, turned upon his heel and strode into the house.

NESBY sighed gloomily. He recalled poignantly the fact that the city government had recently begun waging a relentless warfare against vagrants. A number of his friends, caught in the drive, were now performing forced labor for the municipality. He had no desire to be found alongside them. But, should he fail to connect with employment, and should Uncle Milo fulfill his threat—which he undoubtedly would—one thing was certain: Nesby Thaggard would soon find himself in close juxtaposition to a more or less extended apprenticeship to pick and shovel. The thought was sickening.

Sodden with gloom, he left the house.

Thirty minutes later he was almost delirious with happiness.

It appeared that the Magic City Golden Troubadours and Banjo and Mandolin Specialists had recently been organized for a tour of the State. Upon the very eve of their intended departure it had been found that one of their number, a banjoist, had that very day accepted accommodations at the city jail for an indefinite period. The vacancy thus created was offered Nesby, and he grabbed it gleefully. He hurried home, slipped into the house during his uncle's absence, packed his belongings, and, with the other members of the Troubadours, left the city that night.

Strangely enough, the trip proved a huge success. The colored citizenry of Selima, Anniston, Gadsden, Montgomery and other points turned out *en masse*. When the troupe arrived in Mobile, Nesby had in his possession more ready money than he had had in years.

IT WAS on the morning of his second day in this last named city that, strolling aimlessly along Davis Avenue, Nesby came abreast of the sign that announced that one July Johnson conducted a grocery store within. Perhaps the alliteration caught his fancy, for he paused. A glance inside revealed a not uncomely looking young colored woman who seemed to be presiding over the destinies of the institution. The combination of a good looking young lady and food in large quantities proved particularly alluring.

He straightened his tie, cocked his hat at precisely the correct lady killing angle and entered the store.

He bent his body forward, hat swept suddenly from his head, in his conception of a Chesterfieldian bow, as the young woman came forward.

"Mos' Venish like maiden, I greets thee!" was his airy salutation.

"Was you lookin' for sump'm?" the most Venus like maiden retorted, coldly. But the look of interest that flared in her

eyes at sight of the dapper young stranger belied the chill in her tone.

"A angel!" was the prompt response. "But sump'm seem to whisper 'at my ques' am ended!"

"Don't sump'm seem to whisper sump'm else, too?"

"Like which?"

"'At 'is questin' business ain't de on'y thing 'bout you 'at's ap' to be ended?"

"How come, fair seek?"

"'Count o' yo' brash ways—an' yo' ramblin' tongue. Callin' a puffedekly strange lady outside her reg'lar name!"

Nesby bowed grandiloquently again.

"Come de time a gen'leman ain't know a lady's reg'lar name," he offered propitiatingly, "needcessity deman's 'at he 'dresses her by de mos' fittin'es' one 'at comes to him. Is I right? I is!"

"Heahs you tell it, you is. I'm busy. What yo' want?"

"Ca'm yo'se'f, angel; ca'm yo'se'f!"

"'Is makes twicet I done tole you 'at ain't my name!"

"Naw'm? What is it, den?"

"Look like, bein' you is one 'ese fly-up-de-creek smarties, you'd fine 'at out wid-out astin' me!"

Nesby had a hunch and played it. He placed an index finger against his forehead, closed his eyes, and, for a moment, pretended to be immersed in thought.

"De on'y part what trouble me," he said presently, "is mus' I 'dress you as *Mis' July Johnson* or *Miss July Johnson*?"

His random shot had scored a bull's-eye. The young woman smiled outright. And, with the smile, the last vestige of her coldness vanished.

"I ain't no 'Miz'—yet," she confided frankly. "Up till de present time, I's heart free an' fancy whole."

THUS it started. Nesby's interest, at first passing, deepened with the progress of their acquaintanceship. When, at the end of the week, the Troubadours completed their stay in town and moved on to other fields, they left one of their

expert banjoists behind. Mr. Nesby Thaggard had decided to adopt the city of Mobile.

His wooing, from this point on, was fast and furious. It proved to be irresistible. July was plainly fascinated by the elegant, talented stranger from Birmingham. He had about him the manner and the airs of one from a larger city, and this, perhaps, helped in dazzling the impressionable young woman.

Unquestionably, too, he had a way with the opposite sex. He succeeded in being extraordinarily convincing, for the simple reason that he was sincere. He was hard hit. During the progress of his courtship he didn't work any—of course. July soon became accustomed to the casual manner in which he would open a can of sardines from the stock in the store, and, adding to this a carton of crackers from the same source, proceed to make a meal. In less than two weeks after their first meeting Mr. Nesby Thaggard had become the husband of the quondam Miss July Johnson.

For reasons that were perhaps absolutely adequate to herself July had never mentioned to her husband the existence of an encumbering female relative until a few days before Mrs. Johnson was due to return from the visit to her sister in Gulfport. Even then Nesby saw no reason for dismay at the simple announcement that the lady was returning to take up her abode with them. It was not until he had actually met her that he realized that exciting developments were about due.

MRS. JOHNSON was tall, proportionately broad, raw-boned and muscular. Her presence radiated a native energy and an unequivocating disposition. Save for the little difference of sex, she might have been the prototype of Milo Sloper, of Birmingham. Nesby was no fool. He was not long in realizing that a continued association with his wife's aunt could mean but one thing for him: work. Perish the thought! Either



" 'Huh! Is he one o' de Sons o' Res', too?' "

that, or one of these days Mrs. Johnson would be apt to tear loose, in which contingency someone would be due for a trip to the hospital. And Nesby entertained no false theories as to the identity of this someone. The outlook, to put it mildly, was decidedly gloomy.

Nesby soon became impressed with the idea that he and Mrs. Johnson would have to part company. Since he had no intention of leaving the wife who was ministering so plentifully to his material needs, and to whom he was really very much attached, the problem resolved itself into one which had for its object the proper and lasting disposal of Mrs. Johnson. This would require thought. Perhaps the outside air might prove inspiring. He left the store and strolled down the avenue.

Meantime, in the Thaggard apartment Mrs. Johnson was still elaborating upon the unpalatableness of the lemon that her niece had plucked in the garden of love. July attempted a faint defense.

"Maybe, aun'ie," she urged timidly, "he's kinder weak fo' work."

"Weak, huh?"

Mrs. Johnson gazed eloquently at the devastation which Nesby's appetite had wrought with the midday meal.

"He may be weak fo' work, but he's sho' hawg strong when it comes to linin' up at de feed trough!"

"Reckin him eatin' so much gives him a unworkin' inclination?"

"I reckon 'is much!" Mrs. Johnson shot out heatedly. "I reckon if he don't go to work p'utty soon, I's goin' to be givin' him a *uneatin'* inclination!"

IT WAS near supper time when Nesby returned to the store with a partial solution of his problem. Mrs. Johnson being a widow, the obvious thing was to marry her off to someone who would take her out of the city. Just here, though, he was stumped. He had checked off, mentally, the list of male acquaintances he had made since coming to Mobile. There were several bachelors and

widowers in the lot. So far, however, he had been unable to convince himself that any one of these would react favorably toward a proposition that he leave town solely for the purpose of taking with him a not too attractive widow of more than middle age. The scheme was perfect, save for the fact that about three-fourths of it was missing.

The greater portion of the night Nesby passed in restless tossing to and fro upon his bed. It was not until near dawn that inspiration smote him. Then he had it! Uncle Milo Sloper, of Birmingham! Uncle Milo, a widower and childless, alone in his home, would be the very man . . . provided! If Uncle Milo could be brought to Mobile and married to Mrs. Johnson, it was a cinch that she would accompany him upon his return home. Then . . . happiness and unlimited leisure for Nesby Thaggard.

Very deftly the subject was introduced at the breakfast table. Nesby had done more than justice to the morning meal, and, pushing back his chair, had lighted a cigarette. Choosing a time when he knew he would have the undivided attention of both women, he loosed a Gargantuan sigh.

"Sho' wisht I could see ole Unc' Milo!" he remarked longingly.

"Which Unc' Milo?" Mrs. Johnson demanded.

"In Burnin'ham."

"Huh! Is he one o' de Sons o' Res', too?"

"*Him?* Unc' Milo res'? Ma'am, he's de mos' unreshtin'es' man dey is. What wid his barber shop an' his two pressin' clubs, he don't nevuh res'."

Mrs. Johnson's interest still seemed unaroused.

"Well," she wanted to know, "whyn't you go an' see 'im? Us mought could spare you fo' a year or two."

"Tain't 'at, ma'am!"

Nesby heaved another enormous sigh. "It's him. Unc' Milo needs a change—an' res'."

"Humph!"

Nesby, watching his antagonist closely, aimed his next shot carefully.

"Yassum. What wid him workin' so hard, an' bein' a widower besides—"

"He ain't ma'ied?"

AT LAST Mrs. Johnson's interest had quickened. Widowers . . . well . . . that brought on more talk. Nesby followed up his advantage skilfully.

"Naw'm . . . An' ain't li'ble to be, neether—long's he hangs 'roun' Burnin'-ham."

"How come?"

"Well'm—he's been prospectin' 'roun' 'at town fo' a wife fo' years, an' he cain't find nobody to suit him."

He paused for a moment. Then he finally threw down the gauge.

"He's mighty unsuitable—Unc' Milo is."

"Po' man!"

"Yassum! I kinder thought he mought have better secess, was he to go to some other town fo' a while."

It was patent that Mrs. Johnson had been touched. For the moment she seemed to have forgotten her antipathy toward her nephew-in-law. Five minutes later she was joining her insistence with that of her niece that Nesby invite his uncle down for an extended visit. This he agreed to do.

But here he was face to face with another problem. Should Uncle Milo come to Mobile and find that his nephew was without employment, he would be certain to open up on his favorite topic. And this would undoubtedly stir Mrs. Johnson to similar action. Either one of them, alone, would be bad enough, but both together—! He groaned aloud at the thought.

He spent the greater part of the forenoon in composing the letter of introduction. He informed Uncle Milo of his marriage and also stated that he had secured a splendid position. He was working regularly, he said, and was enjoying it immensely.

When he had finished the letter he went out in search of the splendid position. He

was pathetically sure that something would be offered him. And, in the event that Uncle Milo should decline the invitation—well, a fellow could always quit a job.

He came in late that afternoon. From his expression, both July and her aunt knew that something out of the ordinary had transpired. But they were scarcely prepared for his startling announcement.

"It's finally located," he said, with a flourish.

"What you means, dollin'—located?" July asked anxiously.

"In jus' de kine o' position what suits me?"

"You ain't got you no job?" Mrs. Johnson asked, shocked.

"Sho' to be!"

Something had evidently happened during the afternoon to peeve the lady. The air of good fellowship which she had permitted to invade their interview of the early morning had entirely vanished.

"What it is?" she asked scornfully. "Drivin' de street sprinkluh on rainy days?"

For reasons of his own, Nesby chose to overlook the slur. He retired upon his dignity.

"It's a reg'luh position," he announced coldly.

"Reg'luh, huh? Reckin you mus' a decided to become one 'ese' Monday walkuhs!"

"What you means—'Monday walkuh'?"

"'At's de kin' o' man what walks into a job eve'y Monday mawnin', reg'luh, an' den walks outen it jes' as reg'luh at dinuh time an' don't go back to it no mo'. You oughta have a puffec' talent fo' dat!"

Just here July broke into the conversation again. She was commencing to feel, vaguely, that her aunt was beginning to be a bit unfair to Nesby. Besides . . . whose husband was he, anyhow? "What kin' o' position is it, dollin', sho' nough?" she asked interestedly.

Nesby threw back his head and expanded his chest.

"Clubbin'!" he announced, proudly.

"Clubbin'?"

"Yeah. Workin' in a white folks' club."

"What does you do?"

His immediate reply was rather ambiguous.

"Oh-h . . . I's jes' a sort o' gen'al stevedo' fo' de club."

LATER Nesby outlined, with elaborate attention to detail, his manifold duties. Spurred on by the plainly evident interest and adoration in July's eyes, and by the knowledge that as long as he continued talking Mrs. Johnson's chances of making cutting remarks were lessened to just that extent, he expanded at considerable length. In fact, since the truth is to be told, it was a case of nothing but expansion. His story was fabrication, pure and simple.

He had left home that afternoon filled with the foreboding that he would have no difficulty in finding a job. Five hours spent in a more or less determined search, however, had proved fruitless. Jobs, or at least, the kind that he was looking for, were not being offered in the open market.

But he had been seized with an idea. He decided that, upon his return home, he would offer, for the consumption of his wife and Mrs. Johnson, the pleasing fiction that he had secured work. Besides, he had already posted the letter to Uncle Milo in which he advised the latter that he had gotten a job; and, since tomorrow would be another day, when he could resume his search for work, he had no hope but that a job of some sort would attach itself to him before sundown.

The unaccustomed tramp about town had rather wearied him, and, after his first burst of eloquence had subsided, July found him; for the first time since their wedding, her husband was singularly quiet and undemonstrative. His good night kiss seemed especially lacking in its usual pep and ardor. He retired at an unusually early hour. July thought upon the change, slight though it was,

which had come over him, but maintained silence.

Next morning Nesby started out again. During the forenoon he visited the different hotels and office buildings, inquiring for a position as elevator man. He was just as successful as he had been on the previous afternoon. He telephoned July that he would not be home to lunch. His duties at the club, so he stated, would not permit his leaving.

He devoted the afternoon to a series of calls upon the various hotels and restaurants in town that employed colored waiters, but these latter, it appeared, were, at the time, a drug upon the market. From what he was able to learn, he was convinced that every second colored man in Mobile was looking for a job as waiter. He would have sworn that those who were not were already engaged in running elevators.

July met him in the doorway of the store that evening.

"Dollin'," she greeted him happily, "I's got some news fo' you!"

His response was listless.

"Yeah?"

"An' you can't guess what 't is?"

Nesby sighed dejectedly.

"I ain't eben goin' to try."

"Den I'll hafta tell you. Dey come a postal card fo' you f'um yo' Unc' Milo, an' he'll be heah tomorrow. Now—ain't you got sump'm to be glad 'bout?"

Nesby swallowed a groan. July, watching his expression closely, wondered. And that evening she observed that he was less talkative, less attentive to her, and, strange to say, even less responsive to her advances than he had been the evening before.

UNCLE MILO came the following day as per schedule. During the first few days of his visit Nesby trudged the streets incessantly, in search of work. The one thing that served to cheer him was the fact that his uncle was plainly drawn to Mrs. Johnson. And his interest in her appeared to be growing daily.

As the days succeeded each other, July's first, last, and only interest became centered in her husband. Ever since he had gotten that job at the club he had been so different. In the beginning he had been the most ardent of wooers; and, later, as a husband, the most perfect of lovers. But now—how his ardor had cooled! It seemed to her that his devotion had first begun to sag in the middle and then at both ends. One evening, unable to remain silent any longer, she broached the subject in the privacy of their joint boudoir.

"Dollin," she ventured rather timidly, "you—you ain't done stopped lovin' me, is you?"

Nesby was absolutely fagged out. Consequently, his attempt at reassurance, while well intentioned, was noticeably lacking in enthusiasm.

"Nunh!" he murmured drowsily.

Naturally, this failed to satisfy July. While she was reasonably sure that his devotion had not absolutely stopped, she was just as sure, on the other hand, that it was slowing down—slowing down rapidly—for some cause. She began to take intimate counsel of herself. Although Nesby had never intimated to her anything of his plans for the permanent elimination of Mrs. Johnson from his scheme of things, it is possible that, in some way, she divined something of it. A visit that she paid the next day might have justified one in assuming as much, at any rate.

It was just across the street from her store that Mr. Goodbrad—Mr. Enos Goodbrad—operated a little hit-or-miss colored restaurant. It was to him, being elderly, and an old friend of the family, that she went.

"Mistuh Goodbrad," she began rather hesitantly, "I—I wants advice."

Mr. Goodbrad's humor—upon those rare occasions when he chose to exhibit it—was of an extra dry vintage.

"'At's de one thing," he replied oracularly, "'at's always free—an' mos' in gen'ally plen'iful."

"Yassuh."

"What 't is you wants to know?"

"It's 'bout Aun'ie."

"A mos' esteemable lady! Her an' who?"

"Nesby's uncle—Mistuh Sloper f'um Burnin'ham."

"A mos' wu'thy gen'leman. I's met him."

"An' bein' as Aun'ie's kine o' gettin' 'long up in years, I—I kinda thought maybe she mought be mo' happier if she was ma'ied."

Mr. Goodbrad took time to digest the suggestion carefully. "Well," he admitted finally, "'t wouldn't hurt her none—at her age—'t any rate."

"Nawsuh! Mistuh Sloper's a mighty fine man, an' Aun'ie—you know she's a *wonderful* cha'acter, Mistuh Goodbrad."

"Dey ain't a mo' cha'acteristic lady no-where's!"

"So, I thought I mought get yo' he'p."

This direct appeal seemed to call for more thought upon Mr. Goodbrad's part.

"You is seggestin'," he said, at last, "'at we shuffles 'em off inta de holy boun's o' mat'imony?"

"Puhcisely!"

"Hm-m-m-m!"

ENOS GOODBRAD was a widower himself and knew how to sympathize with those who had been similarly bereft. But he wasn't the kind of man who plunges helter-skelter into a momentous decision. July's suggestion, if carried out, would entail the use of considerable skill, and perhaps, even *finesse*. It would be well enough to become advised beforehand just how the land lay.

"Does Brother Sloper seem to be in a re-ceptif frame o' mine towa'ds de lady?" he asked presently.

"Him? Yassuh; he's likin' her."

"Much?"

"A whole heap."

Mr. Goodbrad waited for another thoughtful moment. Then:

"Is you mentioned yo' aspr'ations puss'nally to eithuh one of 'em?"



"He was witnessing the most wonderful, the most soul-satisfying sight his eyes had ever gazed upon—Nesby Thaggard engaged in real labor."

"Nawsuh."

"Well . . . I'se willin' to he'p all I can. But, I mus' have exclusif han'lin' o' de case. I can't affo'd to have my rep'tation ruint by any amachoors buttin' in an' mahgoozlin' things. You understand stan's?"

"Puffeckly, suh! All I wants is to make Aun'ie happy."

"I'll do my bes'."

AS FOR NESBY, in addition to the load of his other troubles, he now carried the haunting fear that Uncle Milo would suggest accompanying him some day to his place of employment. It would be just like him to do that: doubt a fellow's word!

And really it almost happened. One morning Uncle Milo stated casually that he would accompany his nephew down town. On the car ride down Nesby was in a perfect panic of trepidation. He had no definitely-formed plan, nor, in his present state of mind, could he seem to think of one. It was with an immeasurable relief that, when they alighted from the car, his uncle remarked carelessly that he guessed he'd stroll about a bit and see the sights. This left Nesby free to go his own way. But the latter was cagy. He had proceeded about a block when, pausing to light a cigarette, he glanced back. Uncle Milo was ambling along in his rear. To make sure that he was being followed, he looked backward at the next street intersection. His uncle was still on the trail.

Nesby was desperate. When they had alighted from the street car he had explained, with a careless wave of the hand, that the club was down the street a few blocks. It could have been nothing less than inspiration which had caused him to get off within a short distance of a fashionable club. With his brain working overtime, he quickened his pace in this direction. What he intended doing, he had no idea himself. He simply hurried on in the hope that something would suggest itself.

And something did. The club house sat well back from the street in the midst of a spacious lawn, and, as Nesby came abreast of this, he observed a colored youth engaged in running a lawn-mower over the grass. Quick as a thought he vaulted over the stone retaining wall and rushed up to the boy.

"Black boy," he panted, "would you like to have an extra qua'tuh?"

"Would a cat like to eat a mice?" was the retort.

"Den here!"

Nesby extended a quarter, which he exchanged for the handle of the machine.

"Le' me run 'is thing, an' you hide yo'se'f behine 'at hedge over dere! An' don't you say nothin', no matter what you sees! Yo' hear me?"

Unquestioningly the boy accepted the quarter and slipped through the hedge, and lay down in its protecting shade, just a moment before Uncle Milo hove in sight. Nesby, minus coat, collar and tie, pretended not to see the latter until he was almost upon him. Then, in apparent surprise, he hailed:

"Why, hello, Unc' Milo! Thought you was seein' de sights!"

"I is!"

He gazed steadily at his nephew.

"I's seein' a sight, right now! Crank 'er up, son!"

Nesby cranked her up. He made the journey to the other end of the lot and back again before he engaged his uncle in further conversation. Then, indicating the smoothly clipped portion of the lawn that was the result of his predecessor's labors, he observed:

"I ha'n't eben started on 'is lawn yis-tiddy mawnin'."

"Mus' a worked p'utty hard."

"Yassuh! But 'at's de way I always works, Unc' Milo."

"Humph!"

"Well, suh, if you thinks it ain't hard, jus' come over here an' try it yo'se'f oncet."

"Nunh!"

Uncle Milo had established himself

upon the stone coping. He grinned slyly. "I druther watch you work."

And for two solid hours he did it. He was witnessing the most wonderful, the most soul-satisfying sight that his eyes had ever gazed upon—Nesby Thaggard engaged in real labor.

Nesby groaned in actual torment of soul. He had thought that pounding the pavements in search of work was the limit, but he was compelled to admit now that chauffeuring a recalcitrant lawnmower was even worse.

But at last Uncle Milo went away. As soon as he was out of sight, Nesby staggered over to the hedge, notified the boy that the mower was now at his disposal, and for two hours occupied the place recently vacated by the other.

NESBY went home tired—dog tired—that evening. As was her custom, July met him at the door. As soon as he entered the store he was struck by the suggestive silence which seemed to hang over the place.

"What's de trouble?" he demanded.

July did not answer at once. During the past few days she had been engaged in an enterprise of her own launching, and now she was seized with a sudden fear that her action might have been ill-timed. She did not speak until Nesby repeated his question.

"Well . . . de fus' thing," she said, timorously, "is 'at Unc' Milo done went home."

"Wha-a-at? . . . When?"

"On de one o'clock train."

"An'—an' yo' aun'ie?"

"She—she's still heah."

For a moment Nesby stared stupidly at his wife. Then he asked weakly:

"How—how come?"

"He puhposed to her an' she woul'n't have him. Den he got insulted an' went home."

"She woul'n't ma'y him?"

Then it was that July knew that her hunch had been *right*! In a twinkling she became metamorphosed. One capable

arm went about the limp, unresisting form of her husband, while the other hand dragged forward a rocking-chair. She pushed him into it.

"Set yo'se'f in yo' mos' fav'ryte rockin'-cheer, dollin'!" she commanded. "An' h'ist yo' feets jus' as high on 'at counter as you wants to! Here! Le' me get 'at banjo!"

A gurgle from Nesby interrupted her. "Whut—whut—whut—"

"I'll 'splain it all. I kinda thought you was wantin' to get shet o' Aun'ie, an' I seed she wasn't takin' to yo' uncle in no ma'yin' way. Den, I thought 'bout Mistuh Goodbrad. He's one 'ese unhurryin' kin' o' mens, an' he'd been co'tin' Aun'ie in a sort o' lef'-han'ed way.

She then told of her visit to Mr. Goodbrad.

"Co'se, when he foun' out he was havin' competition," she went on, "he kinda sprooshed hisse'f up an' puhposed. He tole Aun'ie he'd take her back to Gu'fpo't where dey bofe come f'um, an' where her sister is at, an' she coul'n't resis'. Dey gits ma'ied at nine o'clock an' takes de 'leb'm o'clock train."

"What I goin' do, honey?"

"Do? Huh! You's goin' to stay right heah in 'is sto' wid me! 'Cause when it comes to choosin' betwix' a unworkin' husban' an' a unlovin' one, I takes de unworkin' kin' *eve'y* time."

NESBY smiled beatifically. Followed then another considerable period devoted to matters of a strictly private nature, and when it had ended, July began counting on her finger tips.

"In de fus' place," she said, "Unc' Milo done gone home an' Aun'ie's goin' to be gone. Secon'ly, you's quittin' 'at job. An' in de third place, you spen's yo' time right here wid me. It's jus' like de ole sayin' goes, dollin': It never rains, but it po's'."

Mr. Nesby Thaggard sluggishly strummed his banjo.

"Mo' rain," he murmured happily, "mo' res'."

SLIVERS FINDS A CHAMPEEN

By Carroll John Daly

Drawing by Russell Clinton Meeker

THEY SAY I'm the worst boy in town, but I don't know. What I done—that I done—and stand by. Them that says it ain't much. I've done good things—lots of them, but good things got to be secret, er a feller gets into a peck a' trouble. There ain't no chance to argue on that point.

I'm talking like a book, I know.

There's Mr. Silvers, our grammer teacher. "Slivers," we used to call him. He was a good man, a first-rate man, and even if I lose out with the boys for praising a teacher, I'll stand by *that*.

Slivers was a brick.

He took an interest in his work—which wasn't nothin', but he had all the boys and girls interested—even me.

Which was something, you'll admit!

Now teachers are a queer lot and a good bunch to keep clear of as much as possible. As a rule they ain't got no morals—that's goshul. I never did hear it denied. Yes, sir, on the whole they're a funny lot: always kickin' about what trouble the kids give 'em, and then sneakin' up behind 'em lookin' fer more. Talk about kids bein' sneaky—who ever seen a kid pusseyfootin' it around scatterin' unhappiness.

But that wasn't Slivers' way.

Why, I remember one day I stands up and lied right and left, and then left and right, to him and the principal, and I got caught at it. Baldy, that's the principal, sent Cutie Robinson home with a note about it. Cutie had the start of me, or the note never would 've landed.

It was near nine o'clock when Slivers

ran acrost me. He held me by the arm and said if I went home with him he'd see that father didn't lick me. And he kept his promise. What do you think of that—and him a teacher!

That was Slivers' way.

Under Slivers I began to get good marks in grammer—yes, and in other subjects, too. He'd always look at my report card and if it was good, no matter what the study, his face would kinda lighten up.

"Say, but that's fine, Jack," he'd say. "You make me proud of you."

Think of that, and me the worst boy in the class.

THINGS went along fine until the end of March; then one day, I seen there was something wrong with Slivers.

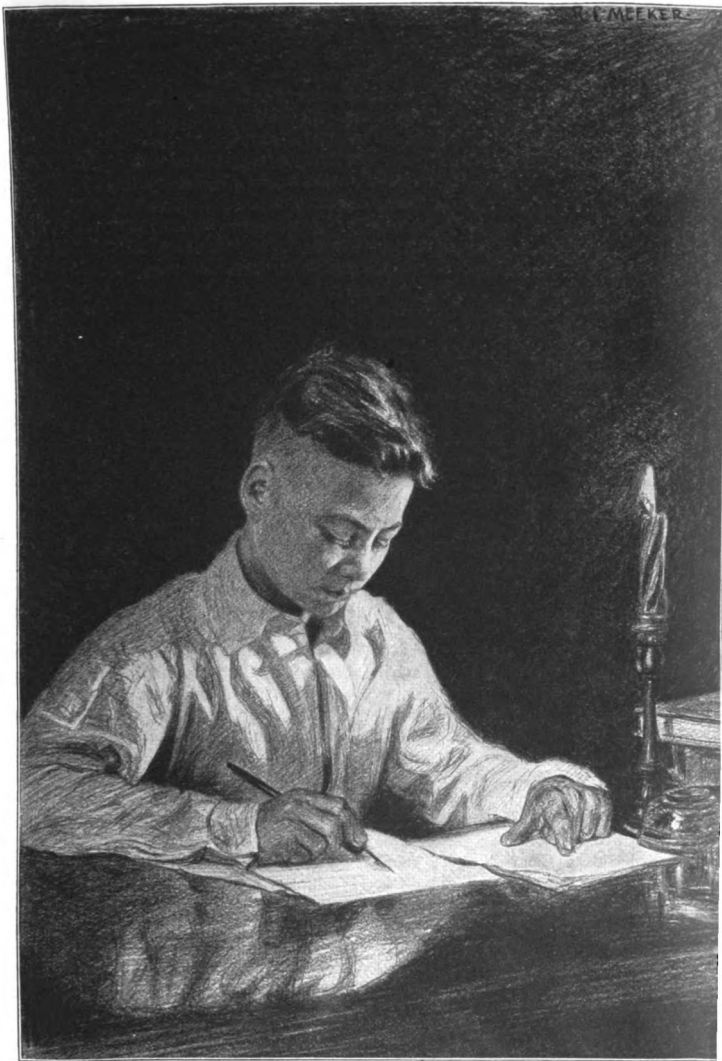
He gave us no cheery "Good morning!" His face was sad and pinched lookin'. We just stumbled through our work, him noddin' yes or no, and payin' no attention to what we said.

It didn't take long before most of the kids forgot all about his kindness and started in to make trouble. They'd give all kinds of foolish answers to his questions and Slivers would nod his head—never hearin' a word. I was just like the rest of the bunch, and once when he asked me what a clause was I up an answered smart-like:

"Somethin' a bear claws with."

"Is it?" he says.

And when the boys and girls busted out laughin', he said, "It don't seem right, Jack, but it must be if you say so."



"Word for word—in the dim light of the candle—I copies that paper."

He put his hand up to his head and looked awful far away, like he was tryin' to remember somethin' and couldn't.

I liked th' joke with the rest of them and thought I was smart and clever to make the whole gang laugh. You know how proud you get when you put somethin' over on the teacher. I don't want to make no excuses for myself—it was a rotten trick—but I want to say right here, that this was before I knew what Slivers' trouble was.

As time went by, Slivers got worse—got thick in the head. His hair turned gray, and then white, till you'd hardly know him for th' same man. He was just as kind as ever, but he wasn't cheerful no more. People in the village got talkin' about him. Said he was a little queer.

Mr. Hastings, the superintendent, was for puttin' him out. Mr. Plant, Jimmy Plant's father, and president of some kind of bored, up and said, "Mr. Silvers' services have been long and honorable; let him finish the year."

The super didn't like that and kept a-tellin' Mr. Plant that he was hurtin' the youngsters' chances. Mr. Plant didn't like that much, and he said, kinda snappy:

"Mr. Silver's position will stand or fall by the showing in the final examination."

The super opened his mouth but he never said nothin'. Mr. Plant give him a look that closed it. When I grow up I'm going to try to be a president like that. Why that's better than being president of the United States. Just think of being able to shut up a super with a look. Oh, boy! I'd just follow old Hastings around keeping him quiet.

IT WAS just about this time I found out what was the matter with Slivers. I never knew where Slivers lived, nor never cared much. Then, one day I was walking by a little house about three miles outside of the village. There was a small garden in front and right in the center of a flower bed I spied a Jack-in-

the-pulpit. There was no one about and I wanted that Jackie, and not bein' particular whose garden I took it from (bein' the worst boy in town), I hopped the fence.

Just as I stooped to pick it, a sweet voice, 'most the sweetest I ever heard, called from some window above.

"Don't touch it—please!"

The voice was so sweet, so kind and gentle, I would no more have picked that Jackie than if it was dynamite. I looked up but couldn't see where the voice come from. Then a figure rushed at me from the doorway. I didn't have no chancet to run or nothin' before a man had a-holt of my shoulder.

"Hands off!" the man shouted. Lookin' up, I seen Slivers shaking a cane over my head. I was so surprised I didn't even try to cut and run. Gee, he looked wild!

His hair was all wavy and his face red. I'd hardly known him, he was so mad.

"Careful, father," the sweet voice come again. "I'm sure he wouldn't hurt my Jackie."

At the sound of that voice all the anger went out of his face. He dropped the cane and stood lookin' at me.

"It's Jack!" he says, after a while. "Excuse me, Jack. I wasn't myself."

He took his hand from my shoulder and patted me on the head, then looked down at the flower bed.

"That Jack-in-the-pulpit keeps my little girl alive."

My, how soft and low he said it!

I looked up at the window and seen his little girl. You could tell the minute you saw her that she was the owner of the voice. I never seen no one as pretty as she was. She was just like some angel. Her eyes were big and black, and her curls hung about her shoulder and rested on the window sill. She smiled at me and my heart gave a funny jump. I just acted like a dummy. No sir-ee—I never saw a girl half so pretty—even in the movies. The next minute I had dragged

off my hat and was walking into the house with Slivers.

It was from Gloria (she was twelve, just two years younger than me) that I heard about Slivers' trouble. She made me sit down by her side.

"First," she said, "I want to thank you for being so good when father feels so bad."

I could have fell through the floor when she said that, but I didn't; I just swung my hat about and listened.

When she was four years old she was hurt in an accident and couldn't walk till the past winter. Then she could go on crutches. Then, last February she fell downstairs. Now, she had to lay on that cot by the window forever—but forever wouldn't be long. An operation was necessary. Unless she had it she knew the end of the summer wouldn't find her propped up in that little bed looking at the flowers. And she had hoped to be walking by that time.

Gee, it was tough. Gloria had expected to go to the seashore in the summer, for Slivers hoped, by being gentle and kind to her, to bring his class up to the highest standin' in the county and win the prize of five hundred dollars that was given to the high school teacher whose class held the best average in the final exams. He had no more chance of winning that five hundred than—well—than a bluefish has of gettin' wings.

NEXT DAY I knew my lessons but got into trouble in school. It was at noon, and as Slivers passed through the yard a boy called Eddie Fitzgerald, a big boy and one we were all afraid of, tapped his head and says:

"There goes Crazy Slivers!"

The next minute I give him such a swipe across the jaw that it surprised us both.

But he didn't want to get up and fight it out. Somehow ruther I didn't care if he did or not. I wasn't afraid of him no more. I was kept in two hours, but it didn't make any difference, because

three other boys found out the next day—and I went home with a black eye.

IN A WEEK I was running that class. I licked boys that I never thought I could even tackle. There was no more laughing at Slivers, no more making a fool of him in class. I didn't care who the fellow was, I just laid for him after school. Pretty soon it got around the school, and I was called "Slivers' Champ-peon." I was proud of the name, too.

The older boys at school began to hear about me being Slivers' Champ-peon, and although most of them were too grown-up to bother with us little fellows, there was some of those low-down, nasty kind. You know the sort I mean. Big bullies who are never satisfied unless they are making life miserable for someone smaller than themselves. But I never seen the boy who could put it over me yet, and it would have been best for most of them if they had never started at me.

ALL THE TIME I was trying to plan ways to help Slivers out of his trouble and—save Gloria.

One day when I was over with Gloria looking at pictures I noticed that she wasn't much interested, but kept looking at a "shiner" I just got.

"You got that fighting! Didn't you, Jack?" she asked.

"No, I was out in the barn and—"

"Jack," she cut right in on me, "please don't lie to me. You were fighting. Weren't you?"

"Yes!"

I couldn't, somehow, lie to her when she looked at me like that, not even if she wouldn't let me see her any more.

"I'm so glad you told me the truth."

She looked at me for the longest time. Then, she whispered, "Slivers' Champ-peon."

I guess I must of turned red as a beet. I could see it was all up with me now, but I made up my mind there would be blood spilt if I could find the guy who told her that.

She must have read death in my look, or she never'd of answered so quick. I turned my head away—I couldn't bare she should look at me.

The next thing I knows she puts her two arms up around my neck and pulls my head down close to her and—and kisses me. Yes, Gloria kisses me!

"I love you for it, Jackie. I'm always going to call you Jackie, because I loved that Jack-in-the-pulpit so much. But I won't miss it now."

She keeps her head on my shoulder, an' I knows what it is to love a woman.

It was gettin' late, when Slivers hobbles up the stairs with her dinner. We parted kinda sad. It must have come to both of us at once that Gloria'd never grow up to be no man's wife—least it came to me. Gosh, if I could only get my hands on five hundred bucks. I wished I was a bandit. . . .

GLORIA would get a little better and then a little worse. It almost drove me and Slivers crazy.

Then, about two weeks before the final exam I was spending the night at Jimmy Plant's house. We'd often visit each other and tell each other everything that happened. But I never told him a word about Gloria. I just couldn't.

Around twelve o'clock Jimmy and me sneaked downstairs to make a raid on the kitchen. The door to the back stairs was always locked at night, so we goes by the front stairs. Everything is fine till we comes back loaded down with eats. We goes into the library to get a book that Jimmy wanted to lend me.

We no more than gets in the room when the front door slams. Mr. Plant was coming home from a bored meetin'.

Jimmy blows out th' candul and runs acrost the room and out into the dinin' room, but I was stumped. Yes, sir, stumped! I thought Mr. Plant would go right upstairs and I ducks behind the large curtains by the window.

And none too soon! I had hardly pulled the curtains around me when the

lights are flashed on, and peeping out I sees Mr. Plant and Super Hastings.

"I won't take but a minute of your time," said the super. "It's about a matter that worries me. The examinations are two weeks from tomorrow. I suggest again, sir, that this grammer test be not held. The whole thing will be a farce."

"No, no!" said Mr. Plant, irritable-like. "I thought I said the last word on that. Mr. Silvers stands or falls on this examination. Let that be an end to it."

"Very well!" said the super, as though he'd like to be mad but dassn't. "Here is a copy of the grammer examination. I want you to understand I am a fair man, sir. It is not as hard as last year."

"Oh, I know you ain't got no personal grudge against the man, Hastings," laughed Mr. Plant, "but if you're partic'lar in this matter, why I'll look over the paper—in the mornin'."

"I am *very* partic'lar," the super said. "The answers to that paper—if there are any answers—will make the school the laughing stock of the county."

Believe me, I looked out and watched carefully where Mr. Plant put that paper.

It is four o'clock in the mornin' when I sneaks downstairs and finds the paper. Word for word—in the dim light of the candle—I copies that paper. Not hard? Well, it was mostly Greek to me. There wasn't two questions in the ten that I could of answered, and since I met Gloria I was studying grammer day and night. And Slivers—that paper let loose on his class would be his death warrant.

Now comes the question, What to do with the papers. I thought first of givin' them to Slivers, but he wouldn't take them.

That much was sure. He'd turn them back to the super, an' him havin funny ideas about things. I couldn't give a copy to each of the pupils. They would be glad to have them, but it was too risky.

What did I do? Well, just let me tell you something. When my brain's goin' at night—but there I am, blowin' again.

WELL, I finds out that Slivers has a nephew about twenty miles away. His trade was teaching school, too, but he is in a private school what had closed for the summer.

I goes to see him and asks him if he'll come and substitute for Slivers. I tells him Gloria is bad and the old man has to stay home with her.

The end of it is he said he'd come, seeing he could run back and forth on the train every day.

It wasn't hard to get Slivers to stay home for a week. Just had to say that Gloria needed him. He'd have chucked up the whole works for her.

The nephew comes. He is just a pocket edition of Slivers. He never visits the little cottage, it bein' a good hour's walk, and he havin' to make his trains.

Every morning I was to bring him his instructions from Slivers.

Every morning I'd give him three of those questions I had copied. When he would try and get off on any other subject I'd walk right up to his desk and remind him that Mr. Silvers was particular about them questions and no others.

I think he gets onto the game about Thursday for he does nothing but drive those ten questions home, till us kids were dizzy.

Friday morning I was sure he was on, for when the super walked in he went off on something different.

NEARLY all of Saturday and Sunday I spent with Gloria. I guess I cheered her up, too. I didn't tell her what was coming off, but I told her she was going to get well. I guess she believed me, too, for when I left, Slivers told me he had never seen her looking so well.

"I hope against the doctor, Jack," he said. "I try to make myself believe different, but I'm not like you. Young and innocent."

"Young and innocent!" He didn't know—and never would know—the desperate

character he had taken into his house. I could see how simple he was. I would have to watch out for Gloria after this—what criminal might not enter his home and carry off his child—my sweetheart.

Monday—grammar examinations in the study hall, at 9:15.

Gee, I was nervous. But no one knew it.

No one knew the load I carried on both of my shoulders. Not that I thought they'd forget the answers. They'd be more likely to forget what day Christmas came on. What I was troubled about was the questions.

Mr. Plant had a good heart and might make the exam easier, trying to be kind to Slivers. If he had that crowd would've written the other answers, anyway. I don't believe they knew anything else.

When my exam was laid on the desk I didn't turn it over. I couldn't. I just set and looked at the others.

Pretty soon the girl next to me turned her paper over—indifferent-like. She looked at it a minute; then, the vacant look left her face and she started writing. Then another turned and wrote. Pretty soon every pen in the room was flying over the paper—mine, too.

Slivers sat up in the front of the room! He seemed sort of dazed as he watched the kids writing like fire. He holds one of the copies in his hand and keeps looking at it and scratching his head. He looked sad and far-away like.

IT'S WINTER again now. I've just left Gloria at her home. She is tired—after a hard day's skating. Gloria's all right again; the prize money paid for the operation, and that not only saved her life, but—well, we won first prize at the school dance last Saturday. As for Mr. Silvers (I call him Mr. Silvers now—Gloria likes that better), his hair is still gray, but from the reports of his grammar students, it looks as if he'd win another prize this year, and without my help neither.



WOMAN AND THE LAW

By Victor Rousseau

Illustrations by Garrett Price

HOLLIS stopped and threw another log on the fire, watching the flames shrivel the brittle bark, before leaning back in his chair again. He fixed his gaze upon the man on the other side of the fireplace.

"Do you mean what you said literally, Segrue?" he asked.

Judge Segrue exhaled a cloud of smoke from his cigar, and watched it curl upward until, caught by the heat of the fire, it dissolved in whirling rings. He pressed his slim finger-tips together as he answered, with deliberate emphasis:


"Yes, Hollis, that is my exact opinion. Law is a very rough and ready instrument of justice. Often it is an instrument of injustice. The older I grow in experience, the more I become convinced that the ancient custom of private vengeance in specific cases is based on a correct human instinct."

It was an astonishing thing for Judge Segrue to have said. The Judge was the embodiment of all that was conservative and correct. Coming from any

one but himself, his remark would have appeared irresponsible. But for nearly forty years Segrue had been going from strength to strength in the estimation of his contemporaries. He leaned back, drawing at his cigar, and watching his auditors, a faintly ironical smile upon his handsome face.

He was speaking in the club room. But it was more like the living room of a private mansion. The fishing club was the organization of a few wealthy men who had purchased a whole chain of lakes in northern Maine. There were some half-dozen buildings of substantial structure, each being a small bungalow. From the club room a green lawn, bedecked with flowers, sloped down to the water, and the pine woods came down to the rear of the camp. The polished hardwood floor was covered with costly rugs.

There were comfortable lounges and spacious, overstuffed armchairs. The club house, like the bungalows, was lit by electric light. The brick fireplace



"He ran down to the lake edge, entered a canoe, took up the paddle and pushed out from the shore . . . then vanished among the shadows."

threw out a pleasant warmth in the cool of the autumn evening.

Alonzo Evershay Hollis was one of the leading spirits and richest members of the club. He was only a year or two younger than the elderly judge, and was the president of a large manufacturing corporation. In private life he was benign, suave, and, to all appearance, less merciless than his enemies called him. He had married a second time, late in life—a woman many years his junior. Perhaps it was her influence that had softened him. Certainly they were devoted to each other, and it was agreed that Mrs. Hollis had a more potent influence over him than any of his business associates.

TWO other men were in the room. One, Chester Winscombe, was a little over thirty, and one of Hollis' departmental heads, whom the manufacturer had summoned to the club for the purpose of a consultation.

Edwin Carberry, the other, had only arrived an hour or two before, and was to leave the next evening. He was a middle-aged New England man, the head of a concern which had recently been absorbed by Hollis. The manufacturer had invited him to run over from Bangor, where he had business, in order to discuss certain matters.

Hollis pondered. "If you are correct, civilization hasn't accomplished much," he said to Judge Segrue.

"Civilization," Segrue answered, "is the product of men of normal mentality. But some men and women were born outlaws. Ishmaels, their hands are instinctively against their fellows. One encounters them in every rank of life. Most of them become the victims of their environment. Sometimes, however, a man or woman of this type creates a false adjustment, and becomes an agent of harm to the community. Law cannot contain them. They can neither do justice nor receive it. They should be outlawed."

"Do you know many such people?" asked Carberry.

"I can name half a dozen prominent and wealthy ones," answered Segrue.

"You are advocating private justice seriously?" Hollis inquired.

"Quite seriously," replied Segrue. "Civilization is not based upon law, but upon an unwritten compact between man and man, between man and woman. It is this latter compact that most of these outlaws violate. When a woman is hanged, or sent to the chair, the law is vindicated—but does not our conscience reproach us?"

Carberry nodded vigorously. "You're right there, Segrue," he said with conviction.

"Formerly," continued Segrue, "we had a rough and ready instrument of justice in the duel. Its abolition was a mistake.

"Some men are not fit to live." He

turned suddenly to Hollis. "I am thinking of the Brayton case of many years ago," he said.

Not a man answered him. The Judge continued:

"I am speaking among friends. If I am violating the proprieties, as your guest, Hollis, it is because I have always felt deeply upon the subject, although I played no part in the trial. I am convinced that Mrs. Brayton suffered an injustice."

He glanced at Hollis again for a moment, and went on:

"Brayton, you remember, was a young clerk in Rodman's employment, and happily married. He was sent out of town on a mission. During his absence Mrs. Brayton shot Rodman in his apartment. She claimed that he had persecuted her, had threatened to discharge her husband; that she had gone to him to plead with him, and had shot him in self-defense. She admitted, however, that she had gone there with a revolver, prepared to shoot Rodman unless he promised to retain her husband in his employment and to cease persecuting her.

"Rodman's story was that he had grown tired of her, and that she had shot him deliberately, and of design. In evidence of this he produced certain letters of hers in court. Mrs. Brayton was convicted of an attempt to murder and sent to the penitentiary for five years."

Segrue glanced at his host again. "Those letters were forged," he said.

"How could it be proved?" asked Carberry, after a few moments.

"The forger made a verbal confession on his death bed to a hospital attendant. The man repeated it to a friend of mine, a young newspaper man who had always believed in Mrs. Brayton's innocence, and had followed up the case. Subsequently he denied it—bought, no doubt, by the person who was chiefly interested in suppressing the truth. My friend could do nothing; he had no evidence."

"What happened to the husband?" asked Hollis.

"He divorced his wife and disappeared. He should have stood by her, believed her, and—well," he ended grimly, "there's my principle of private justice, though, as a judge, I should, of course, carry out my duties under the law."

"'Almost thou persuadest me—'" quoted Carberry, after a few moments of silence.

HEAVY STEPS sounded outside; the door opened, and a fifth man entered. He looked about fifty years of age. The heavy-featured face was expressive of intense power and unscrupulous resolve. A heavy black mustache partly concealed the flabby jowl. The eyes were close-set and cunning.

At his entrance a sense of constraint made itself manifest immediately. Segrue's keen blue eyes fixed themselves for a moment upon the face of Chester Winscombe. The young man was staring at the newcomer with a set, bitter look. In another moment the other's glance would have been drawn by it. Segrue made a sudden sound with his knuckles against the arm of the chair, as if to warn him.

"Hello, Rodman! Had any luck?" asked Hollis.

Rodman's face twisted malevolently at Hollis's address. "Not a thing," he answered. "Either there are no fish in Second Lake, or that guide Pierre's a fool, or both. Where are the ladies?"

"Gone for a walk, I believe," answered Hollis, with a little, involuntary shrug of his shoulders.

But as they spoke feminine voices were heard outside, and a moment later two women entered the room. Mary Rodman was a brunette of attractive and vivacious appearance, about thirty years of age. Queenie Hollis was a blonde, a few years her senior. Mary Rodman alone would have struck the observer as a remarkably handsome woman, but in the presence of her companion she was almost eclipsed.

Tall, high-colored, with great masses of

fair hair piled about her head, Queenie Hollis had also a certain quality of power, in addition to her poise and appearance. One hardly perceived her beauty in that atmosphere of womanly strength. She went to her husband's side and stood there, looking down on him affectionately.

"My dear, let me present Mr. Carberry," said Hollis.

Carberry advanced and bowed; their eyes met in momentary appraisal. At that moment Mary Rodman asked her husband:

"What luck, Eustace?"

"Oh, damn these fool questions! I've answered that one!" Rodman snarled.

In the ensuing moment Segrue touched Chester Winscombe on the arm. Winscombe's eyes were blazing.

"I can't stand this," the young man muttered.

"Keep quiet!" whispered Segrue.

MARY RODMAN, standing with flushed cheeks in the middle of the room, looked utterly humiliated. Queenie Hollis left her husband's side and slipped an arm through hers. It seemed to the Judge as if the two women were protecting each other, in a sort of tacit alliance among women, as if some strong, secret bond united them. But he thought the look on Queenie Hollis's face was more than pity—terror, despair, as if her friend's humiliation was her own.

Chester Winscombe's own eyes never left Mary Rodman's face. As if aware of his scrutiny, Mary turned and gave him a momentary glance of supreme pathos. Rodman and Carberry had left the room. The two men remaining knew the commonplace story. Winscombe and Mary had been engaged three years before. They had had a foolish quarrel, Rodman had come into the girl's life, with his vitality and a certain fascination which he could display in intervals of moroseness, and she had married him in pique. If she had not been bent on thwarting her own happiness she would have discerned his innate crookedness, which

made men unwilling to associate with him.

It would have kept him from membership in the fishing club, had Rodman been proposed in the ordinary way, but he had bought the share held by a retiring member, and so evaded the black balls. Every one, including Pierre, the guide, and Alphonse, the cook, disliked Rodman. Winscombe and he had never met until the day before, and, until his arrival, Winscombe had not seen Mary since their quarrel.

Queenie Hollis broke the silence. "I'm going to bed," she said. "This air's enough to make one want to sleep twelve hours."

"I second that proposal," said the Judge.

They said good-night to one another, and drifted toward their rooms. With eyes that observed everything, Judge Segrue watched Winscombe go toward his quarters in one of the nearby bungalows. He saw Rodman waiting outside the door, waiting to catch Hollis. The two men met beneath the hall lamp, their faces set like flints, and Segrue, who had been Hollis's lawyer, and was still consulted by him unofficially in his affairs knew that in the relentless battle which had been set there was to be no quarter.

He knew that the long, private warfare between the two men had reached the breaking point, and that one of the two must inevitably go under.

"Won't you come over to my quarters for a few minutes and smoke a cigar, Hollis?" Segrue heard Rodman ask.

The tones were almost friendly, and yet there sounded something threatening, almost sinister, under the smooth accentuation.

"Not tonight, Rodman," Hollis answered curtly. "We should disturb your wife."

"Oh, my wife's used to being disturbed," said Rodman, with a sneering laugh.

"I'll talk to you tomorrow," answered Hollis with finality. "Good-night!"

"Better make it tonight," retorted Rod-

man. "There's something of importance that I may want to speak to you about, if you still decline a satisfactory arrangement—something that we haven't taken up yet," he continued.

There was no mistaking the overt threat in Rodman's tones now. Hollis swung on his heel and turned away without a word.

RODMAN looked after him malevolently. Then his expression changed, and Judge Segrue saw that the evil look on his face embodied, not humiliation, but triumph.

"Going to bed, Segrue?" asked Hollis in the doorway. "Bit too late to talk, isn't it! But this is my night, in a way. Unless evidences err, I've got Eustace Rodman by the throat at last. It's been a long chase, but I've had my hooks into him for a goodish while on account of various things we know about him. It's nip and tuck, but if I win on the showdown I'm going to strip him clean and turn him out into the cold world."

He laughed at the thought of it, but it was not an evil laugh like Rodman's—only merciless.

"Yes," he said reflectively, "I think Rodman's time has come at last. Mind you, Segrue, I'm not holding up that Brayton case against him. That's ancient history. In my opinion a woman who goes to a man's rooms doesn't deserve much sympathy, and I guess there wasn't much to choose between them, if the truth were known. I've no use for that kind. She got what she deserved, in my opinion. He got his, too, but it didn't stop him, and he's going to get the rest tomorrow, unless he's got a stronger hand than I imagine he has. The man's a human skunk!"

The two men turned at a rustle, to see Queenie Hollis standing in the hall.

"Are you coming, dear?" she asked.

"By George, yes!" answered her husband. "We'll fish First Lake together in the morning, Segrue," he said, "and then I'll talk about my plans. I've ordered

Pierre to call you half an hour before sunrise."

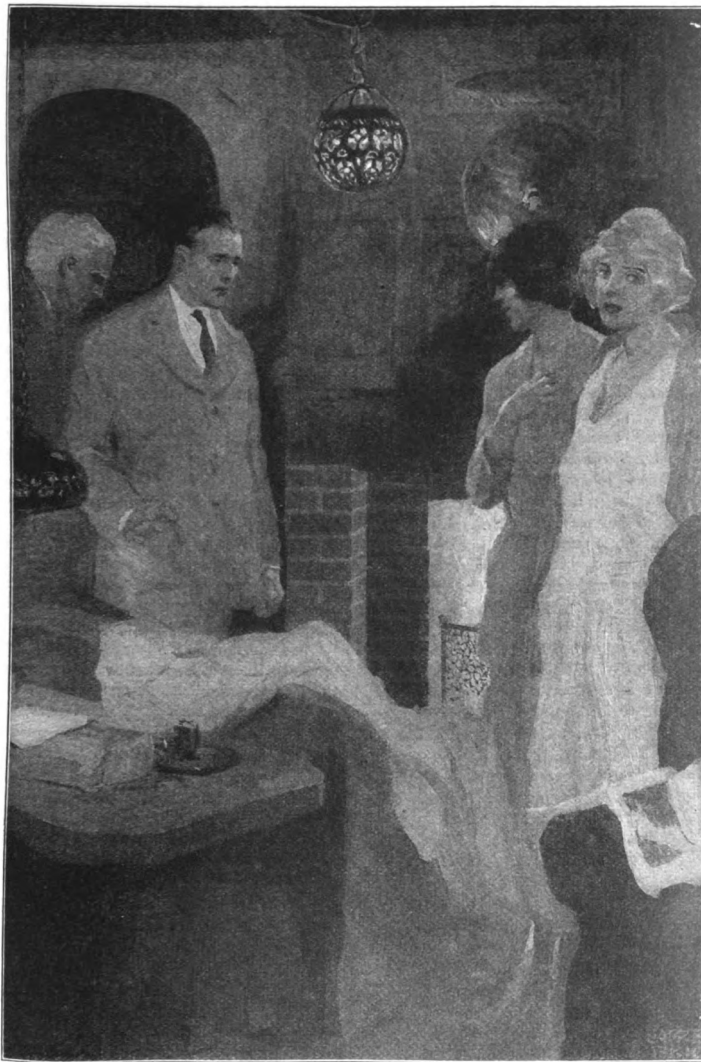
CHAPTER II

THE CLUB HOUSE occupied, roughly, the central position in the group of bungalows. It contained, besides the club room, the dining room and kitchen, and a two-room suite on the other side of the hall. There were two bedrooms on the upper story. Hollis and his wife occupied the suite below, and Judge Segrue had the large room above them.

On the left of the club house were three bungalows. The nearest was empty, the second was occupied by Carberry, the third by the two servants, Pierre and Alphonse. There were three bungalows to the right, the first being occupied by Chester Winscombe, the second empty, and the outermost by the Rodmans. All the bungalows were well separated from one another, and there were pine trees scattered about the intervening spaces.

In spite of the mountain air, Segrue found sleep impossible that night. After tossing about upon his bed in vain for nearly an hour, he got up, put on his dressing gown, and sat before the window of the living room, looking out upon the moonlit lake. It was partly the remembrance of the remarks he had made in the club room that was keeping him awake. Never before had he expressed his secret opinions with such frankness. He had surprised himself, but it had seemed to him that the advancement of his theory had been singularly appropriate. For, if ever a man could be described as human scum, that man was Rodman.

He was the crookedest man spiritually whom he had ever known. He had broken the unwritten compact with almost all men, and all women. The old Judge thought of Mary Rodman, with her hopeless love for Chester Winscombe, writhing under the lash of the bully's tongue. It was a miserable



"As if aware of his scrutiny Mary turned and gave him a momentary glance of supreme pathos."

chance that had thrown Winscombe and Mary Rodman together in such surroundings. Neither of them had imagined the possibility of such a meeting, and Segrue had seen that night that it would take very little on Rodman's part to precipitate an outburst on the part of the younger man.

If only some man whom he had wronged had taken Rodman by the throat and strangled him years before, what a sum of misery would have been avoided!

THE JUDGE was about to go back to his bed at last when he began to be aware of the sound of voices beneath him. Mrs. Hollis was apparently making some earnest request of her husband, but his answers were indistinguishable.

Involuntarily Segrue found himself listening to her excited tones. They appeared almost abandoned in their entreaty; yet recklessness and undisciplined emotion were the last qualities which the Judge would have associated with Queenie Hollis.

"I'm asking this for Mary's sake, Lonnie," he heard her plead. "I heard what you were saying to Judge Segrue before we went to bed, and I can't sleep for thinking of it. You know what Mary's life has been with that man; you can picture to yourself what it would be with him when they are devoid of even the ordinary comforts of existence."

Now Segrue was able to distinguish Hollis's answer.

"Don't trouble about that, my dear," he said. "Rodman will fall upon his feet. I can't exactly imagine him begging on the streets, or doing manual labor. Besides, it isn't likely that they'll stay together long. Three years of that sort of life is most women's limit."

"Lonnie, you don't understand Mary!" cried his wife. "She's not that kind. She'd never leave him in poverty. She'd stick to him as long as he needed her. That's her kind."

"Well, you bet Rodman won't stick to her—in poverty, anyway," her husband answered. "And it'll prove the best thing that could happen to her. You know how much a divorce would mean to her and Winscombe."

"Mary doesn't believe in divorce."

"They'll all say that. She will some day," answered Hollis grimly. "I wouldn't have sent for Winscombe if I'd thought that there would be any chance of their meeting here. I didn't imagine Rodman was coming up here to beg off what's coming to him. But now that they have met, I'm going to keep Winscombe here as long as Rodman stays, and see that they have a chance to talk things over. You know, Queenie, I never understood why you and Mary are so devoted, and I've hated it because it's forced me to be civil to Rodman. And it seems to me you're mighty anxious about him."

"Oh, it's for her!" cried Queenie, in anguish. "That's why it's all wrong, what you're proposing to do. Take what's yours, but don't strip them! Leave them enough to live in comfort!"

"Oh, I guess he'll make enough to keep the wolf from the door," Hollis's deep rumble answered. "You speak as if I wanted them to starve. But I mean to strip that vermin to his hide, and throw him out of the sort of decent society he's got into."

"Judge Segrue was talking in the club-room tonight," he continued. "He said such men as Rodman aren't fit to live, and some one ought to take them by the throat and kill them. I agreed with him. I can't kill Rodman physically, but I'm going to put him out socially and financially."

"No, you're wrong, dear. You know I wouldn't refuse you a single thing in reason. But I just can't see it your way. As I look at it, it will mean a merciful release for Mary, either by his act or by hers. If I didn't know you, Queenie, I'd almost think that it was pity for Rodman made you ask me to spare him."

"Pity for him? For him, after the way you saw him treat his wife tonight? It's for her, Lonnie! Do it for me, then! Do it for my sake!"

Again Hollis's tones became inaudible; but presently Segrue, in his room above, could hear Queenie Hollis's hysterical sobbing underneath.

He sat uncomfortable by the window, hating himself for having overheard the altercation. Then once more Hollis's voice burst out, in furious tones:

"For two pins I'd put a bullet through the skunk, Queenie! He's brought nothing but harm to every one he's ever come in contact with. And now he's upset you! That's the last straw!"

The last straw was the last of the dialogue that was audible. For twenty minutes longer Judge Segrue sat there, looking out at the lake. He was just beginning to recover his equanimity, and to think of going back to bed, when his attention was suddenly attracted by a figure moving in front of the bungalows.

IT WAS the figure of a man, but the moon was low behind a bank of clouds, and it was impossible to distinguish more than the faint outlines. Segrue watched it move stealthily toward the end bungalow at the right—Rodman's.

The bungalows were not in alignment, and from his window the Judge could see the rear, as well as the front, of each. Now, of a sudden, he perceived a second, a woman's figure, standing at Rodman's back door.

The first figure did not seem aware of her proximity. It vanished from view behind a clump of pines. Judge Segrue drew his head back quickly. He had done enough eavesdropping that night; he did not mean to play the spy as well. But his heart misgave him. Who could these nocturnal prowlers be but Chester Winscombe and Mary Rodman, engaged in a clandestine meeting?

He had not thought such a thing possible of either. There had seemed something brave and heroic about each of

them, about the way they had met, after those years of suffering and embitterment, with a simple hand clasp. And yet he could not find it in his heart altogether to blame them. He knew what their love had been.

But what cross-purposes were at work among that little group of men and women who had met by accident at the fishing club! And the black heart of the storm was Rodman! Only by his death could the fellow make requital for the wrongs that he had done—his breaches of the unwritten human compact.

Shaking his head, the Judge went back to bed. But still he could not sleep. He was contrasting Rodman with Hollis, Mary Rodman with Queenie. At last he dozed off without realizing it, and had just fallen asleep when two sharp sounds brought him back suddenly to consciousness.

They seemed to roar through his brain, as if the whole universe had fallen, and yet he realized they had been too faint in reality to have awakened him unless he had been subconsciously expecting them.

And he knew now that he had. Every nerve had been tense in him that night, in expectation of something of that kind, although he had not at the time been aware of it.

It had been the double discharge of a firearm.

The Judge sat up, listening. Surely no dream could have produced that stunning auditory effect, although he began to be aware that he had been moving in a dim nightmare of phantasmal figures, a menacing crowd, with hands outstretched toward a central form—Rodman.

And still the echoes of the two shots seemed to ring in his ears, and into his mind there stole slowly the awful consciousness of murder.

It was a sixth sense acquired through years of professional work. The Judge had always known unerringly a man whose hands were stained with blood, since he had ascended the bench.

It seemed an eternity before anything

began to happen. Then the Judge heard steps upon the porch of the club house; Hollis began coming up the stairs.

SEGRUE was out of bed and in his dressing gown by the time Hollis's sounded. He opened the door.

"This is awful, Segrue!" Hollis said in a harsh whisper. "Rodman has been shot dead!"

"Just a minute, Hollis, and I'll be with you," the Judge answered.

Without putting on his socks, he thrust his bare feet into his boots, and quickly fastened the laces. He put on his coat and trousers and accompanied his host down the stairs.

Pierre and Alphonse were standing at the open door of the club house. As they reached the hall Queenie Hollis opened the door of the apartment and stood before them, a wrap about her, and her hair streaming about her shoulders.

"What is it? What's the matter?" she asked, turning a frightened gaze upon them.

Her face was ghastly white in the faint moonlight.

"I—I've been so sound asleep. Where have you been, Lonnie? I didn't hear you go out."

"It's—an accident, dear," answered her husband. "Go back to bed. Judge Segrue and I are going to see about it."

"Is it—is it Mr. Rodman?" she gasped. "I thought I heard a shot from the end bungalow. He's—he's dead?"

"I don't know. I went out when I heard it and met these men. I hoped you wouldn't wake." He patted her shoulder. "Go back to bed, Queenie," he said, "and try not to let yourself be overcome."

She went back inside the room obediently, and closed the door. Pierre explained excitedly as they hurried toward Rodman's bungalow.

"We heard somebody moving about the camp, Alphonse and me," he pattered. "We sleep ver' light since the thieves stole the boat last month. Alphonse and me went down to the lake, but the boats were

all right. Just then we hear the two shots—bang, bang! They come from Monsieur Rodman's bungalow. We run there and look t'rough the window. Just then I see Mrs. Rodman turn out the light in the bedroom. Monsieur Rodman is lying dead in the living room, and Monsieur Winscombe stands beside him.

"My God!" muttered Hollis. He seized Pierre by the arm. "Did he have a revolver?" he demanded

"No, no, Monsieur, I don't see dat," Pierre replied

Hollis turned to Segrue. "That proves nothing," he cried "you couldn't hang a dog on that!"

Segrue did not reply. They had reached the bungalow. The door was open, the lamp still alight in the living room. Rodman was lying on the floor, stone dead, with blood on his breast. Mary Rodman crouched in a chair beside the body, her face in her hands.

Chester Winscombe was still standing beside the dead man. But his expression showed that he was perfectly resolute and self-possessed, and his attitude was almost that of a loungeur.

CHAPTER III

AFTER saying good-night in the club room, Chester Winscombe had gone to his bungalow next to the club house and flung himself into a chair. He sat there for a long time, fighting such devils of temptation as he had never imagined could possibly assail any one.

They seemed to fill the room—living, though formless, entities, crowding about him, shouting out their taunts and commands. And the burden of these was: "Kill him! Kill him now, to win the woman you love and take her away!"

He had known, during the brief instant that Mary Rodman's glance met his the day before, when they came face to face with each other, that she still loved him. The years had slipped away and they were back in memory in the old days, when

they meant everything to each other, and had their lives before them.

Mary's marriage with Rodman had horrified Winscombe. He had put her out of his mind and tried to mask his love with contempt that she should have sold herself for money. But in the instant of their meeting he had known that was not true; he had understood everything, and had forgiven her. Nothing had mattered since, except that they loved each other.

When Rodman had abused her in the presence of the company, Winscombe had only been restrained by Judge Segroe from hurling himself upon his enemy. Segroe's words in the club room had burned like coals into his heart. Death was the only destiny for such a cur as Rodman.

Now, sitting alone in his room, he felt the temptation an overwhelming one. He did not weigh his chances of escape. He thought only of Mary, doomed to a life of shame and humiliation with the brute she had married.

He could no longer resist. He went to his kit-bag and took out an automatic pistol with which he had been used to practise at the Pistol Club; he had brought it with him with a view to engaging in target practice at the camp, to keep his hand in. Automatically, and hardly conscious of what he was doing, he loaded the magazine, and put the weapon in his pocket.

He hesitated at the door. In the back of his mind was still the resolution not to kill Rodman, but all his mental powers seemed numbed in the presence of the overwhelming desire to free Mary from the brute to whom she was bound. Yet vaguely there was shaping in his mind some compromise. He knew Rodman stayed up late going through his papers. If he confronted him, Rodman might fire first, or in some way give him his justification.

It was all very vaguely outlined, and, in fact, impossible, but Winscombe hesitated only a moment before stepping out softly into the half-dark of the moon.

NO LIGHTS showed in the club house, but, as he had expected, there was the glimmer of one behind the shades of Rodman's living room. The rear room, in which the Rodmans slept, was dark.

Suddenly, as Winscombe neared the bungalow, he saw the shadow of Rodman thrown at full length on the shade. An instant later it was joined by another shadow—that of a woman.

Winscombe stepped back into the group of pine trees near by. His brain was working very clearly now, and he was ice cold with resolution. Of course he would not eavesdrop; but, when Mary Rodman had gone back to her room, he knew that nothing on earth could keep him from shooting Rodman.

For she was pleading with him. He could not hear a sound from the place where he lurked, but there was a strange, pathetic shadow-play of the figures upon the shade. Winscombe saw Mary's arms raised in entreaty, saw Rodman shake his head and make a gesture of his hand in negation: it was a pantomime in silhouette, that Winscombe watched in fascination and horror.

But when he saw Mary fall on her knees with hands clasped in agonized appeal, the last vestige of his irresolution left him. The sight of the woman he loved kneeling to her husband resolved him to shoot the brute down in his tracks like a dog, without parley or ceremony.

And he stepped out from the shelter of the pines. A few steps brought him to the door of the bungalow. Now he could hear the girl's low voice, pleading wildly, and Rodman's sneering tones, although the words that either spoke were indistinguishable.

Then Rodman's shadow appeared alone, indistinct and blurring, as the man moved round the lamp on the table.

Though the shade was down, the window was wide open, and between the edge of the shade and the window frame Winscombe could see a slice of the room, and the edge of an open, unshaded window

on the opposite side. Leaning sidewise from the rustic porch, Winscombe placed his finger tips upon the shade, and drew it imperceptibly outward.

The instant Rodman's figure filled that slice of space he meant to fire. Still holding the edge of the shade with his left hand, Winscombe inserted the tip of the muzzle of the automatic between the shade and the window frame, waiting for Rodman to come into view.

Suddenly he heard Rodman utter a sharp exclamation. He thought himself discovered. There followed a tussle in the room, a woman's cry. Rodman was swaying in grotesque silhouette upon the shade. Two shots rang out.

Rodman's cry answered hers, but in a strangled splutter. He appeared, staggering, spinning, one hand clutching his breast, the other a revolver. Smoke drifted through the aperture of the window. There followed the thud of Rodman's fall.

And Winscombe had not fired!

INSTANTLY Winscombe sprang forward and pulled at the door handle. The door swung open. He entered. The bedroom door was closing. As he entered there sounded the snap of an electric light button.

The interior of the bedroom became invisible before the door had closed. Yet the last half-second of illumination disclosed the glimpse of a woman's white garment disappearing within the room. The door slammed, the key clicked in the lock upon the other side. Silence ensued.

Winscombe laid his automatic down upon the table and tried to think. He must act with an ordered judgment, but in the shock of the situation all his instincts were to perform mechanical actions instead. He pulled himself together and bent over Rodman.

The man was lying twisted up upon the floor, and Winscombe saw that he had died practically instantaneously. Only a trickle of blood came from the breast, but the pallor of death was already creeping

over the face, which had begun to assume an inhuman aspect, as if the evil forces in Rodman's soul were already taking possession of his mortal remnants.

Rodman's hand still clutched the revolver with which he had fired back at his assassin, and the fingers, contracting in the death struggle, were flattened against the handle.

Winscombe turned away and looked at the table. He knew that Rodman had brought a number of papers with him, in order to go through them with Hollis on the morrow, in his endeavor to escape Hollis's punishment. He seemed to have been arranging them, for they lay scattered about upon the table.

There were also letters, tied and piled up neatly in a little case by the electric lamp.

After a moment's hesitation, Winscombe went to the locked door communicating with the bedroom, and tapped on it. There was no response, but there came the sound of hurrying footsteps on the other side. Winscombe tapped again, more loudly. Then he put his lips to the crevice of the door.

"Mary! Please come out at once! I must speak to you! Don't be afraid of me!" he called to the woman behind.

The sound of footsteps ceased. A soft rustling followed. Winscombe repeated his appeal more urgently. He had the intimate sense of Mary Rodman on the other side of the door, her face barely an inch or two from his. That door was like the intangible but iron law that had kept them apart so long. He heard her hurried breathing. And suddenly the key clicked in the lock again, and Mary Rodman stood in the entrance. She was fully dressed, and she looked at him with haggard eyes.

"You, Winscombe!" she whispered, with indrawn, agitated breath.

She burst into hysterical laughter, and put her hands over her face, and still she laughed and laughed. Winscombe drew them forcibly away, and held them.

"Listen to me, Mary!" he cried. "I

want to save you. I'm speaking now as I used to speak to you years ago, and you knew we never lied to each other. I came here tonight under a mad impulse to shoot him down in his tracks, like a dog, because he had no right to live after his brutal insult to you last evening. I should probably have killed him if you hadn't. Because that thought was in my mind, I'm going to take the guilt upon myself."

She stared at him incredulously.

"Upon yourself!" she whispered.

"Because I meant to shoot him, and because you did right, Mary. Judge Segrue was saying last night that he should have been killed long ago. Perhaps that influenced me. Anyway, I shot him. Remember that: I shot him!"

Suddenly the girl dropped into a chair, covered her face with her hands again, and abandoned herself to a wild outburst of grief. Winscombe glanced at the dead man, and back at her.

"Mary, you must let me save you," he said. "Quick! Where's the revolver that you killed him with?"

But she paid not the least attention to him, only sat still in the chair, except for the convulsive shudders that ran through her body. Winscombe pleaded with her in vain; she appeared utterly deaf to his words, and overcome with fear.

The sound of voices outside the bungalow reached Winscombe's ears. He shook the girl by the shoulders.

"Mary, for God's sake pull yourself together!" he whispered. "They're coming! Remember, I did it! It's for your sake! Where's the weapon you used? Quick!"

She looked at him for an instant, her eyes like a doomed soul's.

"Chester—go!" she sobbed.

WINSCOMBE'S mind acted with the speed of lightning. He straightened himself and waited till the newcomers were at the door; then, snatching up his automatic, which he had laid down on the table, he swept back his arm and hurled it through the open window at the side of the bungalow into the lake.

He turned to see Hollis and Judge Segrue, with the frightened faces of the guides behind. He thrust out his arm dramatically and pointed at Rodman's body.

"I killed him! You know why I did it!" he raved; and, plunging past them, he rushed into the darkness.

He ran down to the lake-edge, entered a canoe, took up the paddle and pushed out from the shore. The two men, watching him in stupefaction, saw his figure come into view a minute or two later, paddling violently across a stretch of moonlit water. Then it vanished among the shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER IV

JUDGE SEGRUE stooped over the body of Rodman, peering into the face.

"Dead—stone dead!" he said briefly.

He stood up and looked at Hollis, then at Mary in the chair. The girl sat just as she had done at the moment of their entrance; she had neither uncovered her face nor stirred.

"Mrs. Rodman, you must let my wife take care of you," said Hollis, huskily. "This has been a dreadful shock to you. Come with me!"

Mary Rodman rose with an effort. At that moment Queenie Hollis appeared at the entrance.

"I couldn't stay there, Lonnie," she whispered. "I know Mr. Rodman is dead. I've come for Mary."

She caught sight of the body on the floor, and began trembling violently. Hollis put his arm about her in support.

"Who did it?" she whispered.

Nobody answered her. The two men were watching Mary Rodman. Something in the rigidity of her poise made them momentarily regardless of Queenie Hollis. Then she pointed at the floor.

"What's that?" she cried. "Whose is it?"

The Judge and Hollis became aware of a trail of blood spots on the floor.

They began some distance from the body, and ran to the porch, splattering the steps of the bungalow.

Judge Segrue sprang to Mary's side. The girl was falling. With a sigh she collapsed into his arms in absolute unconsciousness.

"Let's get her to your rooms, Hollis," said the Judge.

They carried her to the club house, Queenie Hollis following. They placed her on the sofa in the living-room and left her, Queenie kneeling at her side, applying restoratives. When they got back to the bungalow the servants were still waiting.

"Hollis, may I give orders?" asked the Judge. "Pierre, you keep guard and let no one enter. Alphonse, you'll relieve Pierre at sunrise. And you saw Winscombe throw the pistol into the lake.

"Go down and see if you can find it. It ought to be in the shallows under the bank."

Hollis and he tried to follow the trail of bloodspots outside the door, but lost them a few paces away.

"It looks as if Rodman's bullet grazed Winscombe," said the Judge. "Well, nothing more can be done till daylight. I'd advise you to move into the room opposite mine, and try to get some sleep."

He caught Hollis by the arm as he was about to re-enter the bungalow.

"I wouldn't go back there," he said, "especially in the darkness. There may be other footprints—it's always best to make as few journeys as possible."

Hollis, who seemed dazed by the developments, assented, and retraced his steps.

"And now," continued Segrue, "I shall have to call up the authorities."

"That means Winscombe's capture," muttered Hollis.

"I think he's the sort of man who'll return when he's thought matters over. He behaved more foolishly than he realized at the time," said Segrue.

"You mean—you think he—good

heavens, Segrue, you don't mean he's shielding—?"

Judge Segrue closed his lips tightly.

"Hollis, you know I'm not prepared to answer that," he replied, greatly moved. "We have the same evidence, the same ability to form conclusions—at least—"

He broke off. They went back to the club-house in silence. Going to the telephone, the Judge called up the sheriff in Mayville, a small town a few miles away. When he got the connection, he gave a brief outline of the events of the night in the baldest manner, omitting no essential detail. In reply he was told that the sheriff and a county detective would start at once with a buckboard, to take in the body.

When he had finished telephoning, to Hollis's surprise he asked for a large New England city. Having got long distance and given the number, Judge Segrue hung up the receiver, and, during the wait of twenty minutes that ensued, he paced the hall without speaking. Hollis, seated on the stairs, watched him wearily; he seemed broken by the tragedy.

The telephone rang at last, and Judge Segrue gave a name unknown to Hollis, asking that a Mr. Pettibone come to the camp immediately. He gave careful instructions as to the route, hung up the receiver, and came back.

"That was a friend of mine," he explained. "I want him here for reasons of my own. You've no objections, Hollis?"

"Not the least in the world," replied Hollis, with weary indifference.

"And now," Segrue continued, "if I were you, I'd follow my own example and try to get to sleep. The worst part's coming in a few hours' time, and the sheriff and the detective ought to reach the camp by daylight. I envy Carberry, sleeping through it all," he added, glancing up at the silent bungalow on the left of the clubhouse.

Hollis and Segrue withdrew to their bedrooms. Neither of the men slept, however. Judge Segrue closed his eyes

and lay down in his clothes; but his mind kept following the details of the tragedy. He shook his head and frowned; he hated being mixed up in the business.

JUDGE SEGRUE rose at dawn and found Hollis huddling in the club room. A little after sunrise the sheriff and the detective drove into the camp. The sheriff was a typical small town official of about fifty, alert and practical. County Detective Askew, the name by which he introduced his companion, was a younger man, keen and wide awake; he carried a large bag with him.

A few minutes after the arrival of the buckboard, while the four men were still grouped in front of the club house, Carberry emerged from his bungalow.

He was armed with a fishing rod and gaff, and received the news of the events with manifest dismay.

"I wanted to leave for Bangor this evening," he said to Hollis. "I suppose it will be impossible for us to talk things over under the circumstances."

"You can't wait over a day or two?"

"I might," reflected Carberry. "Let me see—"

"I'd be very sorry to miss our opportunity of getting together," said Hollis, "but I'm hardly able to do justice to my end today, as you'll realize. Stay over the week-end!"

"Well—I will!" Carberry answered.

THE SHERIFF and Detective Askew listened to Hollis and the Judge as they gave their versions of what had occurred. Pierre, under examination, repeated the story that he had already told. "It's too bad," said the sheriff. "Young Winscombe hasn't a chance. We've telephoned all the district, and he'll be arrested wherever he comes out of the woods. Trouble is, some fool may shoot at him. I guess he'll come back here, though, when he begins to realize his position."

He turned to Pierre.

"You say you saw Mrs. Rodman turn

out the light after the shots were fired?" he inquired.

"Yes, Monsieur, I swear it."

The sheriff and the detective exchanged glances. Hollis interpreted them in the obvious way.

"I want to say that Mrs. Rodman is incapable of—" he began.

"Any trouble between her and her husband?" drawled Askew.

Hollis hesitated.

"Well—you know what married people are," he answered. "They may not have been in complete agreement, but I tell you Mary Rodman is absolutely incapable of acting as an accessory to the murder of her husband."

Judge Segrue nudged him and whispered a few words in his ear. Hollis shook his head, then nodded.

"Judge Segrue thinks it advisable for me to add every material fact," he continued, with manifest reluctance. "I may as well tell you, then, that Mr. Winscombe and Mrs. Rodman were once engaged to be married. If I hesitated to mention this, it is simply because I am disinclined to speak about private matters that are irrelevant. It has absolutely no bearing on Mrs. Rodman's position."

Neither of the two newcomers spoke for a moment or two. Then the sheriff turned to his companion.

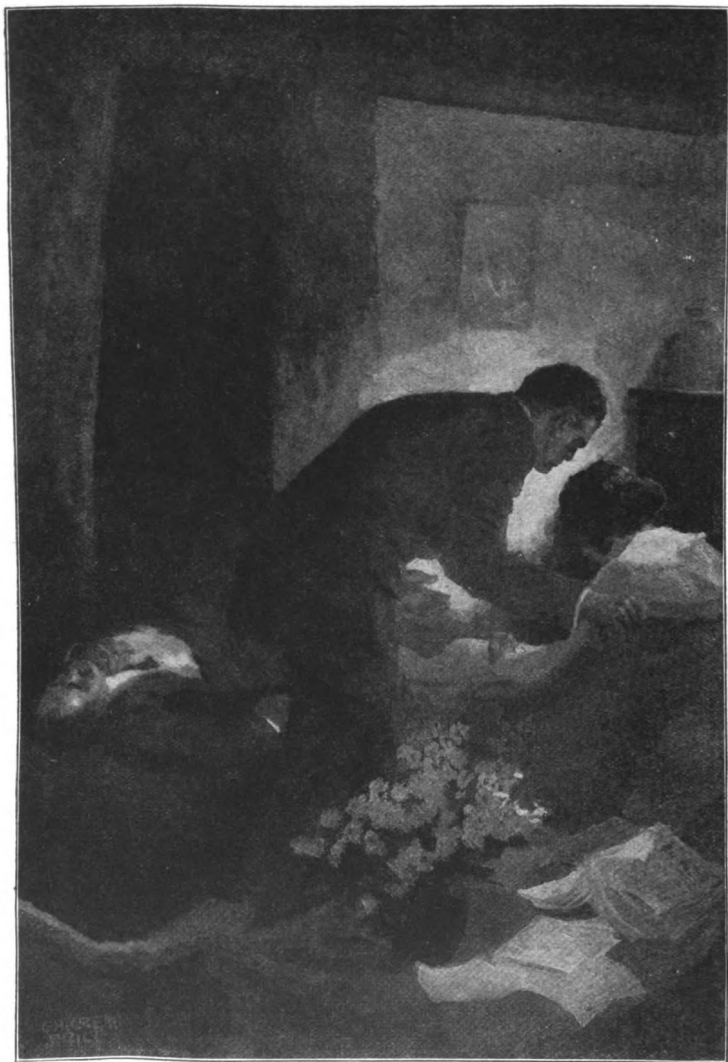
"Well, we may as well take a look at the bungalow," he suggested.

They went inside and at once proceeded to make their examination of the dead man.

"Mighty powerful pistol," commented the detective. "Ball passed clean through the body."

"It was nickel pointed, I would say. One of the newest types of automatic. High velocity, too—you see, the wound's no bigger at the back than in the front. I'd call it difficult to say for sure whether he was shot from the front or the back, wouldn't you, Mr. Bowles?"

He broke the revolver in the dead man's hand and spun the chamber round. One shot had been fired.



" 'Mary, you must let me save you,' he said. 'Quick, where's the revolver that you killed him with?' "

"Found any traces of a ball in here?" he asked.

"We've made no examination," answered Hollis.

They hunted without result. The sheriff gave his opinion that the bullet which killed Rodman had been fired from the door and had passed out of the opposite window. It was impossible to say how Rodman had been standing; he had fallen in a twisted heap.

They examined the trail of blood spots, and lost them a few paces from the door. There were no signs of more, either about the bungalow or at the little pier from which Winscombe had taken the canoe.

"Looks as if Rodman grazed him," the sheriff commented, "but not enough to do much damage. Mighty quick on the draw he must have been, to have winged him in the darkness. Well, I guess my part of this job's ended. I'll take in the body for the inquest, and then I'll have to superintend the hunt for Mr. Winscombe, though I guess he'll surrender himself here today, if he's got sense. Mr. Askew will remain here and handle the case, and bring him in if he turns up. Not much of a mystery, I guess."

After a pick-up breakfast, the body was wrapped in blankets and placed on the vehicle. There came a colloquy between the sheriff and Detective Askew, at the end of which the former went up to Hollis.

"Mr. Askew suggests swearing in your two men as deputies," he said. "I guess that might be the best thing, seeing that you and the Judge are friends of young Winscombe's. It 'll give them legal powers covering his arrest."

He did not refer to the right to shoot, but the others understood.

Alphonse and Pierre were accordingly sworn in, and their duties explained to them.

"You two gentlemen will, of course, remain at the camp until the inquest," said the sheriff. "No need to say that."

"Will you want me?" asked Carberry.

"I guess not, but anyway you'll be staying over, I think I heard you say. I'll notify you by telephone, Mr. Hollis," he added.

"I'd like to see the ladies as soon as possible," said Askew, when the vehicle had driven away. "And I'd be particularly glad of your help, Judge, in examining them," he added.

"You'll have to excuse me," answered Judge Segrue. "I've given you the facts so far as I know them. I'm a material witness, and stand prepared to render you any service that you are legally entitled to demand of me. But I must absolutely decline to go beyond that point."

HE SPOKE with emotion, and Hollis thought he had aged ten years since the evening before. Detective Askew glanced thoughtfully at him; then looked at Hollis.

"Just as you say, of course, Judge," he answered quietly. "I guess you know your rights."

"I should prefer the ladies not to be disturbed for another hour at least," said Hollis. "That is, unless you consider it absolutely necessary, Mr. Askew. They must have had a hard night of it, and you'll realize this has been a great shock to Mrs. Rodman. And I wish to say it's preposterous to suggest that she was privy to the murder. Do you intend to arrest her?"

"Oh, I guess there'll be no hurry about that," answered Askew, easily. "Anyway, I'll wait a while before seeing them. I'd like you to come back to the Rodman bungalow with me. I suppose no one has been inside since the murder, has there?"

"No, the men have been on guard," replied Hollis.

"I'd like this man to remain for the present," said the detective, as they entered the bungalow. "There's a lot of papers here," he continued, pointing to the littered table. "Business matters, I suppose. How long had Mr. Rodman come in for?"

"Only a few days, I believe," Hollis answered.

"Been here long?"

"Since Thursday."

"You don't know anything about these, I suppose?" asked the detective, indicating the papers.

"I believe I do," answered Hollis. "In fact, they have reference to me. Mr. Rodman and I had some affairs to settle, with him. I suppose," he added, "they can be sealed for his executors?"

"The court will have to order that. I'll have to take charge of them. I'll put them together later. Most likely I'll be through by sundown. You don't know if Mr. Winscombe had any business troubles with Mr. Rodman?"

"I'm certain he hadn't. Mr. Winscombe is in my own employment. By the way, you'll realize that I don't wish my private transactions with Mr. Rodman to become public property?"

He glanced at the papers. The detective's eyes met Hollis's in a keen, scrutinizing gaze.

"Oh, sure, that 'll be all right," he answered.

"By the way, have you any rifles in the camp?"

"There are a couple of hunting rifles in the rack in the hall," said Hollis. "Pierre was cleaning them yesterday."

"I'd like the deputy to carry one."

"But—" began Hollis.

"Say, what's to prevent young Winscombe returning at night and arming himself? You can never tell. Anyway, I'd like to look at them."

He accompanied Hollis back to the club house. The Judge, who was standing on the steps, moved quietly away as they approached. Inside the hall two rifles stood side by side in a rack. Detective Askew examined each in turn.

"You say your man cleaned these yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes, I watched him."

"Where d'you keep your rags and polishing materials? . . . In there? . . . Cupboard not locked, I see. This rifle

was cleaned later than the other—in the dark, I'd say."

"What d'you mean?" demanded Hollis.

"Cleaned by a man in a hurry. Too much oil altogether. The stock's soaked with it." He broke the breech and squinted down the barrel. "Take a look," he said, holding up the weapon by the muzzle toward the light.

"The barrel's not been cleaned!" Hollis exclaimed.

"It's been fouled by a shot," answered Detective Askew. "The stock was polished afterward to remove traces of finger prints. And the trigger's dripping with oil, put here for the same purpose. This is the weapon that was used to kill Mr. Rodman!"

"But—but—" Hollis stammered.

"Fact," said Askew briefly. "I guessed it was a rifle bullet soon as I saw the wound."

"With your permission," he continued, "I'll see the ladies now."

HOLLIS, moving as if stupefied by the revelation, tapped at the door of the apartment. Almost immediately his wife opened it. She was fully dressed, her face was flushed, and there were dark rings around her eyes.

"My dear, this is Detective Askew," announced the manufacturer. "He wants to ask a few questions of you and Queenie."

"Very well," answered Mrs. Hollis mechanically, coming out into the hall.

"I'll begin with Mrs. Rodman, if I may," said Askew.

"Will you ask Mary to step outside?" suggested Hollis to his wife. "Tell her I don't think the ordeal will be a prolonged one."

He glanced almost appealingly at the detective.

"Why, Mary isn't in here! Isn't she with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Hollis.

"Mary?" cried her husband. "I haven't seen her since last night. When did she leave you?"

"I don't know. I've been asleep some

time. I was utterly worn out. When I awoke half an hour ago she wasn't here."

CHAPTER V

SEGRUE! SEGRUE! Come here!" cried Hollis, speaking now in uncontrolled excitement. "Mary's gone—left the camp an hour or more ago."

Judge Segrue hurried up, followed by Carberry. "What's that you say?" he asked. "When did she leave?" he continued, turning to Mrs. Hollis.

"I don't know anything about it," replied Queenie Hollis, in the same mechanical manner. "I stayed beside her for a long time last night. She was only half conscious. I thought toward morning she had fallen asleep, and I let my eyes close, and—that's all I knew till half an hour ago, when I awoke and found she was not in the apartment."

She turned to her husband. "Lonnie, she must be found! She may be half delirious!" she cried.

"She was in a terrible state when you brought her here last night."

"Then the first thing to do is to consider which way she's likely to have gone," said Judge Segrue. "If she's taken the Mayville road she'll be found and taken care of. Best not to start inquiries over the phone, Hollis. Probably it's the lake trail or a canoe. We'll see if one's missing. Anyway, she's not likely to have gone far."

The three men hurried down toward the water, leaving Detective Askew with Mrs. Hollis. Askew turned to her.

"I understand you were not a witness of the crime?" he asked.

"No, indeed, thank God!" exclaimed Mrs. Hollis, fervently. "My husband wouldn't let me leave this apartment."

"But you went to the Rodman bungalow?"

"I ran out at last. I couldn't bear to be left here alone. I went to the bungalow door, and—and saw Mr. Rodman's body. Mary Rodman fell down in a faint, and I came back here with her."

"What were the relations between Mrs. Rodman and her husband?"

"Well, they were not very happy together, I believe," answered Queenie Hollis reluctantly.

"Any reason to suppose that Mrs. Rodman and Chester Winscombe cared for each other?"

"Oh, they may have done in the past. But it's too awful to suggest that either of them murdered Mr. Rodman. Mary couldn't hurt a fly. It's impossible, I tell you, impossible!"

"One more question, Mrs. Hollis," said Askew. "Your husband was awakened by the shots and went out?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Leaving you asleep?"

"He didn't want to wake me, of course. I awoke when I heard him coming back into the club house."

"You are a sound sleeper?"

"Not particularly, but I didn't hear the shots."

"Thank you. You say neither Mr. Winscombe nor Mrs. Rodman could have been guilty of the crime. Whom do you suspect, then, Mrs. Hollis?"

He turned suddenly and shot the question at her. Queenie Hollis started violently.

"I—I—nobody!" she cried. "It's all incredible to me."

"May I glance inside your apartment for a moment?"

She stepped aside grudgingly, and Askew entered the living room, went to the connecting door, and took in the bedroom with a single glance. When he went out the three men were coming up from the lake.

"She didn't cross the lake," said Judge Segrue. "There's only one canoe missing. We're going to take the lake trail, and we'll take a rifle and fire at intervals, in case she's within hearing. I suppose you won't need us for a few hours?"

"Not at all," answered the detective.

"We'll be back by sundown," said Hollis, "if we don't find her, and you'll probably have had word in that case that she's

been located on the Mayville road. If Mrs. Rodman hasn't been found we'll call in help and scour the country."

He went inside and spoke to his wife for a few minutes, coming out with two letters, which he placed in a rack on the hall table. "My wife's—to the stores, countermanding orders for provisions," he explained, seeing Askew glance at them. "If you want to read them, you may," he added, sarcastically, as if a little affronted that Askew had been inside the apartment.

"Not at all, Mr. Hollis," disclaimed the detective politely.

And he made his way toward the Rodman bungalow. A few minutes later he saw the three men going down the trail, Hollis carrying the rifle. He watched them until they were out of sight, then went inside.

ASKEW had brought the equipment for a murder case, and at once began moving about the living room and bedroom, making thin deposits of lead oxide in likely places, for the purpose of bringing out finger prints. The results he photographed with a small enlarging camera, developing the films in a cupboard, which he converted into a suitable dark room.

He came out and stood surveying the results with a puckered brow. Then he sat down and went over them with a pocket glass. Apparently puzzled, he hung up the films to dry and directed his attention to the papers on Rodman's table. He could make out little, except that they involved some transactions between Rodman and Hollis.

Then he turned his attention to the letters in the case. At once he became serious. He read several of them through. They were love letters, addressed to Rodman by some unknown woman, and of an uncompromising—or most compromising—character.

"Queer duck," he cogitated, "to carry them about with him, when he'd brought his wife along on the trip! Unless—"

He slipped one of the letters into his pocket and put the remainder back. He went out on the porch. Alphonse, who had relieved Pierre, was seated on the wooden steps, his rifle beside him, munching at a slab of bread and meat. At this moment Pierre came hurrying up, holding something in his hand.

"Behold, Monsieur, I have found it!" exclaimed the guide.

He held out Winscombe's dripping automatic and explained. The detective took the weapon, opened the magazine, and dropped the cartridges into his hand. The chamber had been full; the weapon obviously had not been fired.

"All right," said Askew. "Wait a moment. Has anybody been inside this bungalow since the murder?"

"No, Monsieur," said both the men, promptly.

"Nobody tried to get in?"

"Mr. Hollis wished to enter," Pierre recollected, "but Judge Segreue forbade him."

"When was this?" demanded Askew.

"Just after Monsieur Rodman's body was found, Monsieur."

"And nobody else?"

"No, Monsieur." Both men were positive on that point.

"All right," said the detective, after pondering for a moment. "There's no need for either of you two men to keep guard any more. I'll attend to it. Take that rifle back to the rack. I shall not need either of you for the present. You understand your duties as deputies?"

Alphonse assented volubly. He had acted as a deputy two years before, in a neighboring county. Askew impressed upon them that they were bound to render him any assistance that he might demand of them, and dismissed them.

SATISFIED at last, Askew left the bungalow. Queenie Hollis was seated on the steps. At the sight of him she rose pointedly and re-entered her apartment. She did not emerge during the remainder of the morning. At noon Askew

tapped at her door and asked if he could have lunch sent in to her, but she declined curtly, speaking through an inch of opened door.

Askew smiled. He had the cook bring him something to eat, and took up his position on the club house steps. During the greater part of the afternoon he was aware of Queenie Hollis's quick glances at him from behind the drawn shades of the living room.

It was evident to the detective that he had offended her, but he hardly thought of that. He was busy weaving the threads of the net which he was drawing about the murderer, and he believed that he had his evidence practically complete. Once or twice he went back to the bungalow to reassure himself; at last he packed the films away, slung his case about him, and awaited the return of the searchers.

From time to time during the course of the day Askew heard the rifle shots of the search party across the lake, but when the three men returned late in the afternoon Mary Rodman was not with them.

"No news?" inquired the Judge anxiously of the detective.

"Not a word," answered Askew. "I just called up Mayville. Nothing seen of her. You found no tracks?"

"Not a sign," said Hollis anxiously. "We followed the trail as far as the top of the mountain. We'll have to organize a big search party."

"Pretty late now," said Askew, glancing at the setting sun. "Can't do much in the woods at night."

Queenie Hollis, hearing the voices, came out of her room. She had overheard the gist of the conversation.

"Lonnie, she must be found!" she cried hysterically. "She can't be left to spend the night alone in the woods."

Hollis turned to Judge Segrue with an expression of intense anxiety. "What do you advise?" he asked.

"We certainly can't do much at night," Segrue answered. "Still—"

"See here," Askew interposed. "My opinion is that Mrs. Rodman hasn't gone

far from the camp. Why, it stands to reason that in her condition she wouldn't have wandered over the mountains. As like as not she'll come to her right mind and make her way back as soon as it grows dark.

"You've spent the whole day looking for her without results, and it stands to reason nothing can be done at night. No use raising the country for a night hunt that 'll simply tire out the searchers and stop them from putting in their best work during the day.

"What I'd advise is this. Build a big bonfire on the lawn, so that she'll see it if she's anywhere near. Then wait till the first thing tomorrow, and if she's not back then we'll organize a search party and scour every square foot of territory for five miles around."

"I think that's about the only thing to do," Judge Segrue acknowledged.

MATERIALS for the bonfire were at once collected and soon a huge pyramid of fire was leaping up from the lawn, with Alphonse in attendance. Afterward came a wretched meal, presided over by Mrs. Hollis, and eaten almost in silence. Hollis himself seemed equally broken down by the events of the preceding twenty hours.

"With your permission, Mr. Hollis," said Askew, "I'm going to sleep in that empty bungalow next door tonight."

He jerked his head toward the one on the left, between the club house and Carberry's.

"Yes—certainly—whichever one you prefer, Mr. Askew," answered Hollis mechanically. "There's—there's no news of Mr. Winscombe, I suppose?"

"Nothing so far. The roads are being watched. He'll have to show himself in a day or two."

Hollis shook his head compassionately and said nothing. His wife went quickly to her room, her handkerchief to her eyes. Hollis was following her when Askew said:

"By the way, Mr. Hollis, I've told the

men there's no need to watch the bungalow. I've done all the work there is to be done there, except putting those papers together, and I guess nobody's likely to steal 'em."

Hollis nodded and left the room. Askew's eyes met Judge Segrue's in a steady, momentary, unflinching gaze.

"I wonder just how much the old boy knows," the detective reflected.

Whatever Judge Segrue knew or suspected, he kept to himself. But there was no more chance of sleep for him that night than the night before. He lay on his bed, half dressed, in a deathly stillness.

And, as he lay there, feeling the hours slip past him, he knew that he was expecting an even more startling denouement than the events of the night before. Somewhere the tangled skein that fate had woven about them was about to break.

At last the feeling became so strong and imminent that he rose from his bed, slipped on his coat and shoes, and waited. Each minute seemed on leash, straining toward the culmination. It was still two hours from dawn, but the moon had set, the night was pitch dark, and all about him was the same stillness of unearthly silence, in which he seemed to feel the play of conflicting human passions, locked like wrestlers, but breaking, breaking. . . .

SUDDENLY the denouement came in the form of a single rifle shot from the direction of Rodman's bungalow, followed by a volley. Some one was shouting. Instantly the Judge was on his feet. He leaped down the stairs, past the closed door of the Hollis apartment, and ran into the darkness. The flickering of the dying bonfire hardly illuminated it any longer.

The light in Rodman's bungalow had been snapped on. Detective Askew was standing in the doorway, reeling, blood streaming from his head, but he held fast by the wrist a struggling woman who fought with him desperately—Queenie!

Upon the Judge's heels came Hollis and the two servants. They reached the bun-

galow together. There had been a mad struggle inside. The furniture was displaced, and the floor strewn with papers.

Hollis uttered a cry and leaped at the detective, who released Queenie, and, as the manufacturer caught his wife in his arms he quickly wiped the blood that streamed from a jagged scalp wound, then deliberately drew a pistol and held it to Hollis's head.

"I arrest you for the murder of Eustace Rodman," he said grimly.

And, as Judge Segrue would have intervened:

"Step back!" he shouted harshly. "You knew it. I was wise to your game when you declined to help me." Without letting the pistol in his hand waver an inch, he turned his glance on the astonished Frenchmen.

"I call upon you men to guard this prisoner," he said. "If he escapes or kills himself, you'll be responsible."

His eyes flickered grimly on Queenie Hollis's face.

"I want you as an accessory," he said. Queenie Hollis clung to her husband's arm.

"It's all right; I'll tell everything," she answered in a restrained, mechanical voice.

As Hollis, who appeared completely stupefied by the turn of events, glanced at her, Judge Segrue took a step toward her.

"Yes, tell him everything, Mrs. Hollis," he said quietly. "And I'll add something. Let's go into the club room."

CHAPTER VI

ESCAPING from the bungalow, Chester Winscombe paddled with desperation across the width of the lake until he reached the shadows of the trees against the farther shore. His plunge from the scene of the murder had been designed to give him the appearance of guilt; the sole thought in his mind had been to take the proof of murder on himself and to save Mary.

Beyond that first, immediate instinctive

act, his mind had not functioned; but now, as he paddled across the lake with furious energy, it began to work with tremendous speed. He realized that Mary would admit her guilt rather than allow him to be sent to the gallows, or to life imprisonment.

He must, then, make good his escape. So long as he was at liberty, Mary was safe, and would accept his sacrifice. Winscombe knew that the news would have been telephoned everywhere long before he could get free. His only chance was to strike boldly across the forest toward some distant point, avoiding roads and settlements.

He knew that a man can live comfortably for at least two weeks without food, performing quite normal activities the while, once the pangs and faintness of the first day or two have ceased. He decided to aim north, cross the Canadian border, and, covering fifteen to twenty miles a day, to emerge from the forest region miles away from the scene of the tragedy.

But, as he paused within the shadows of the trees, feeling the first fury of his nervous impulse spent, his arm fell to his side. Something wet dripped on his hand. He discovered that his sleeve was soaked with blood.

Then he perceived a little tear in the cloth. He took off his coat, found his shirt saturated, and discovered a neat groove through the fleshy part of his arm.

Rodman, in spinning round, had discharged his weapon blindly, and the chance shot had struck him, but in the excitement to which his mind was keyed he had not been aware of it.

He cut away the blood soaked arm of his shirt, and bound up the wound with his handkerchief. Though it had bled a good deal, it was comparatively slight in character; it was obvious, however, that the arm was definitely out of commission.

With his sound arm Winscombe guided the canoe into the shallows, and beached it there. He would be unable to use it again, but then, he would have no further need of it.

HE TORE AWAY the tail of his shirt and improvised a sling for his arm, which was now beginning to throb painfully, and then set off. A trail ran here to the water's edge, uniting with the main road some distance away, and branching off up the mountain. Winscombe had spent two weeks at the camp the year before, and was roughly acquainted with the locality. Beyond the ridge of mountains lay a wilderness, traversed by paths leading northward toward the boundary.

He picked up the trail and doggedly began the ascent of the mountain. But he had not gone very far before he felt his strength failing him. He had lost a good deal of blood. Half a mile or so from the edge of the lake he was forced to stop. The mountains still towered above him, and the trail was growing steeper every moment. After endeavoring in vain to continue his journey, he crept into a thicket beside the trail, flung himself down, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

There ensued a night of delirium. What happened Winscombe never knew. He was only dimly aware of trying to continue his journey, of the agonizing fear of discovery, with Mary's consequent inculpation; he came to himself to find the risen sun staring at him through the trees, and the forest all about him. His arm was badly swollen, and the wound throbbed like knife stabs. Thirst tortured him.

Under the mad impulse to find water he plunged down the mountain slope, expecting to discover the trail, but each step led him further and further astray. When at last he stopped through exhaustion he realized that he was hopelessly lost. His watch was gone, and he could only vaguely guess his position from the sun.

That day was a period of delirium, during which he staggered on mechanically, sinking to the ground and rising again and again in the hope of finding water. It was not until after sunset that his mental activities revived. At dark he found the pole star, recalled his direction, and set out in the direction of the lake once more.

"That day was a period of delirium during which he staggered on mechanically."

And at last, when he felt that he could go no farther, he found it suddenly.

He flung himself upon his face at the edge and drank furiously. He lay back, exhausted, but momentarily appeased. His mind was clear now, and he realized that in his condition his plans had become impossible. He must die there, and, dying, he would bear the guilt of Rodman's murder forever.

Then he saw Mary!

SHE was coming toward him up the trail, her dress torn and covered with burrs, her hair hanging about her face, and he looked at her stupidly, almost believing that she was a phantom of his brain. But it was a phantom of flesh and blood that ran to him and clung to him, and then, kneeling beside him, removed the blood-stained bandage from his arm and substituted a new one, torn from her underskirt.

"Chester, I have been searching for you since morning," she sobbed beside him. "I knew that you were wounded, and I was in agony. Why did you kill him? Oh, the pity of it! He was a doomed man, dying of an incurable disease. Any moment he might have fallen dead, and we—and we—

"Oh, what folly, what madness, Chester!"

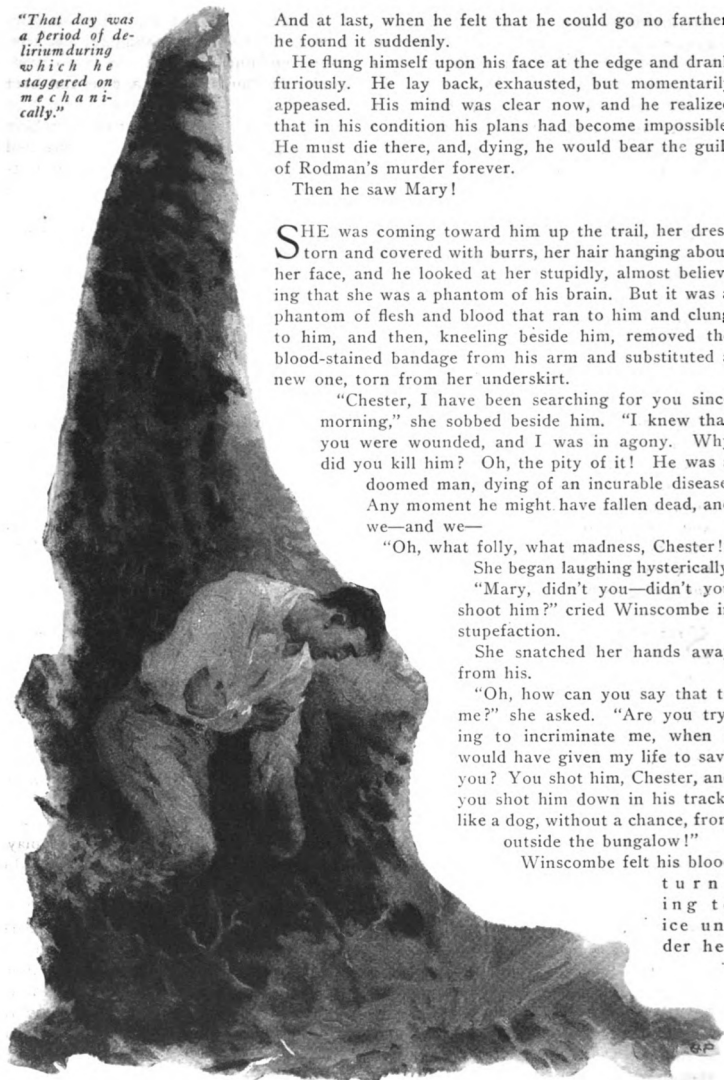
She began laughing hysterically.

"Mary, didn't you—didn't you shoot him?" cried Winscombe in stupefaction.

She snatched her hands away from his.

"Oh, how can you say that to me?" she asked. "Are you trying to incriminate me, when I would have given my life to save you? You shot him, Chester, and you shot him down in his tracks like a dog, without a chance, from outside the bungalow!"

Winscombe felt his blood
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vituperation. In his weakness he reflected bitterly that he had become a hunted fugitive for her, while she was trying to place the guilt on him.

Suddenly Mary put out her hands and caught him by the shoulders. An access of furious energy made her slim body almost as strong as a man's.

"Do you swear that, Chester?" she cried. "Is that true? Do you swear you didn't murder him?"

"What's the use of swearing?" asked Winscombe hopelessly. "Mary, the instant before he died I heard you struggling with him. I saw your shadow on the blind."

She stared at him piteously. "My shadow!" she whispered. "Oh, God, Chester, it—it was not mine!"

He seized her by the arm in wild excitement. "Not yours, Mary?" he cried. "Then—then it must have been—"

But she had sunk down beside him, covering her face in a wild outburst of grief, and for a long time he was unable to calm her. Yet, when at length her sobbing ceased, and she drew her hands away, she had grown composed again.

SHE drew his head upon her knee, and they crouched there together. Winscombe slept from weariness, but all night Mary watched him with sleepless eyes. When at length he awoke to the touch of the girl's hand on his shoulder there was the sense of dawn in the air, though it was still dark.

"Chester, do you think you can walk?" asked Mary, bending over him.

He struggled to his feet, and they set off slowly along the trail, Winscombe in front, overcoming his weakness with a strong effort of will. Their progress was infinitely slow over the rugged trail, encumbered with roots and stones.

At last, looking beyond the trees, they could see the camp faintly outlined against the darkness, behind the flicker of the dying fire.

And suddenly a volley of shots rang out.

Instantly Mary seized Winscombe by the arm, and almost dragged him back into the underbrush. They crouched there, breathing heavily, and seeking each other's faces in the darkness.

Minutes of suspense went by. All hope had vanished. Whatever it was that had happened, they at least must wait until another night had closed on them. At last Winscombe rose.

"We'll have to go back," he said wearily.

And, as he spoke, a figure loomed upon him out of the darkness.

The two closed in a mad tussle, though neither could see the other's face. For fifteen seconds Winscombe fought his invisible antagonist, while the girl, unable to intervene, could only watch the struggle in helpless frenzy.

Then, summoning his last strength, Winscombe flung his assailant to the ground. He lay there, making no attempt to rise. Mary ran to Winscombe, who caught and held her.

"Chester, come!" she sobbed, tugging at him. "Quick, before he recovers."

Suddenly she screamed:

"Chester, he's stabbed you. There's—there's blood all over you!"

Winscombe looked into her face vacantly, and suddenly collapsed into unconsciousness beside his antagonist.

CHAPTER VII

INSIDE the club house Judge Segrue, in contradiction of his former decision to take no part in the proceedings, had assumed the dominant rôle, while Detective Askew, reduced to playing a subsidiary one, faced him and the Hollises.

"I'm willing to explain, Judge, and to listen," he said, "because I've got these people sure, and the best thing'll be to drop all pretense and come straight through with the facts. I guess you've known all along, and are now ready to aid the cause of justice. And if it's shown to be something less than murder, nobody'll be more pleased than me."

He turned toward Hollis.

"You worked it well enough," he said, "but you gave yourselves dead away. In the first place, about snapping off the light in Rodman's bungalow—well, that man Pierre naturally thought it was Mrs. Rodman he saw, but it wasn't. It was you, Mrs. Hollis. There were traces of prints all over the switch button, and, planted clear on top of them, and ten times as firm, there were finger and thumb prints that weren't Mrs. Rodman's at all.

Hollis, who had been watching the detective's face intently, turned and glanced at Queenie, then half rose, uttering an inarticulate syllable. Judge Segrue stepped quickly from his chair to his side, and placed his hand on his shoulder, whispering something.

He resumed his seat, and Askew continued:

"Well, next we've found young Winscombe's pistol, and no shot had been fired out of it. Whoever murdered Rodman—not that it's in doubt—used that rifle in the hall and cleaned it afterward. Easy enough to slip in in the dark and souse it with oil.

"It stands to reason young Winscombe couldn't have put back the rifle and cleaned it if he ran straight down to the lake and paddled away. No, his part's clear enough. He thought that Mrs. Rodman had murdered her husband, and he made his getaway to shield her.

SUDDENLY the manufacturer sprang from his chair with a growl of fury. Instantly the detective had him covered with his pistol, and, after a moment of hesitation, he sat down again.

"You may as well hear it out," continued Askew. "You two were working hand in glove, but for different reasons. I'll come to that in a minute. When I learned that Mr. Hollis tried to get into the bungalow after the murder, and that you wouldn't stand for it, Judge, I guessed if I withdrew the guard he'd be back again tonight. That's what I was waiting for, but you were a little too quick for me,

and so I've got this to thank you for." He touched the bandage round his head. Hollis stood up slowly.

"Do you mean to say it was I attacked you tonight?" he demanded.

"Well, I guess so."

"Did you recognize me?"

"I caught your wife in the bungalow. I guess that's sufficient," retorted Askew. "And I was saying you two had different reasons. I'll take that up now. One of you shot Rodman, and I guess you're man enough, Mr. Hollis, not to squeal if I put it on you instead of this lady. You shot him because you'd had business troubles with him, and wanted him out of the way. He had you by the throat, according to those carbon copies of the letters he'd written you. That's why you wanted those papers sealed—and that's why you tried to get back into the bungalow to take 'em a few minutes after the murder—and again tonight. And Mrs. Hollis was hand in glove with you, but for a different reason, and one which I guess you don't know.

"It'll have to come out," he went on reluctantly, "and I guess you may as well know now. Rodman was your wife's lover—"

With a single bound Hollis was out of his chair and at the detective's throat.

But before Askew could fire—if he had meant to fire—Judge Segrue, who had been watching Hollis like a lynx, had sprung between them. With surprising strength he forced the two apart.

"Sit down!" he cried, grappling with the manufacturer, who in inarticulate rage, was trying to hurl himself upon Askew again.

"That was a lie—and we're going to prove it was a lie—but he didn't know."

And by sheer strength he forced the manufacturer into a chair, where he lay exhausted, glaring at the detective.

WITH a sudden chivalrous impulse Askew stepped forward, shook the cartridges out of his automatic, and laid it on the table. He turned to the Judge.

"There was a package of letters—love letters from a woman—in Rodman's case," he said. "They were signed by a fictitious name, but the writing was Mrs. Hollis'—letter for letter. I compared the writing with that on the envelopes of the letters she'd written for the post.

"Rodman was holding them over her, in case Mr. Hollis showed fight. That's why she went to Rodman's bungalow, meaning to steal them after Mr. Hollis had murdered him. And that, maybe, is why Mrs. Rodman was an accessory—you can't tell what women 'll do—"

"One moment," the Judge interposed. "What name was signed to those letters, Mr. Askew?"

"Nora Brayton."

Hollis's cry rapped through the room like a pistol shot. Queenie turned toward him.

"Yes, I am Nora Brayton," she said quietly. "I am the woman of whom I've heard you speak in connection with Eustace Rodman, and always with contempt and bitterness. I heard you speak of her so on the evening of his death: 'When I heard you say that, I resolved to kill him, rather than lose your love.'

"I am one of Eustace Rodman's victims. I am the woman who shot him years ago, who went to the penitentiary for him. I came out, and found myself divorced, alone, friendless. I built up my life again, met you, loved you, Lonnie, married you, hoping my secret would forever remain secure, but risking all because I loved you, and because I trusted in your love for me.

"The inevitable day came when Rodman and I came face to face. He recognized me. He told me that the secret of my past was safe—so long as he chose. He told his wife—that was one of the diabolical ways he had of hurting her. Mary is true as steel. She sought me out, made me her friend and confidant; she never believed in my guilt.

"You recognized me, Judge Segrue, and, though you have never told me so, unwittingly you let me know. But I always knew you were my friend and would

never betray me. I was never afraid of you, and I think you always believed in my innocence."

"I know it, and I declare it to you now, Hollis," said the Judge with emotion.

"The time came," continued Queenie, "when my husband and Eustace Rodman became business enemies. Then he began to threaten me with betrayal, unless I used my influence with my husband in his behalf. As time went on, his threats grew more serious. At last the time arrived when denunciation was imminent. He told me that he was coming into camp to have it out with my husband; that, in the last resource, he would save himself by showing him those letters.

"They were lies—forgeries—lies! I swear it again! Forgeries, done so skillfully that they once deceived a court of law, and could never now be disproved. I went to his bungalow at night, mad, desperate, resolved to kill him. I took a revolver with me. Mary did not expect me, but she did not intervene. She saw that I was past reason, and that no act of any human being's except his own could save Eustace Rodman this time.

"I begged and pleaded with him. He laughed at me, always returning the same answer: my safety depended on my ability to persuade my husband not to use his advantage. Then—then—"

SUDDENLY she broke down in tearless sobs that choked her utterance. She stretched out her arms blindly toward her husband; but Hollis, huddled up in his chair like an old man, only looked at her fixedly, and made no movement toward her.

Judge Segrue crossed to her and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"So that is why you killed Eustace Rodman," he said gently. "No jury will convict—no jury on earth."

She looked at him more calmly.

"I didn't," she said quietly. "I didn't. I wish I had. He had had experience of me, he knew I had a revolver; suddenly he snatched it out of the hand I held be-

hind my back. We struggled, and—some one fired. He fired wildly and fell. Then I saw Chester Winscombe standing in the doorway, his pistol pointed at him—”

The Judge looked at her in pitying surprise, but did not contradict her. And suddenly she tottered forward and flung herself upon her knees at Hollis's feet. Judge Segrue bent his gaze on him, as if trying by force of will to draw the words of pardon from his mouth, but Hollis only sat silent, huddled up in his chair.

Askew cleared his throat.

“I knew about that case—the Brayton case,” he said. “Of course, if Mrs. Hollis states that she alone was responsible for Rodman's death, why—”

“I wasn't,” said Queenie simply.

“There's no one else,” said Askew quietly, “except your husband, and—”

THERE was the stamping of feet outside the club room. Mary Rodman stood on the threshold, supporting Winscombe, who, ghastly pale, leaned against the jamb. Behind them came Pierre and Alphonse, supporting the body of a man.

It was Carberry.

They laid him on the sofa. Blood was oozing slowly, from two gaping bullet wounds in his breast, and it was clear at once that he was dying. He opened his eyes and looked about him, recognized Queenie wistfully, and seemed to call her.

At the sight of him Judge Segrue suddenly staggered and clutched the head of the couch to save himself from falling.

“My God!” he muttered. “God, it's Brayton! And I didn't know him till now!”

Brayton's lips moved. He was speaking, so softly that they knelt beside him to catch his words.

“I killed Rodman,” he whispered. “I

never knew he was here—never suspected till—what you said—”

He was looking at the Judge.

“You said he deserved to die. And that those—letters were forgeries.

“I—went to kill him. And I—wanted those letters to make sure. I was mad at the sight of her. We knew each other. I—had to kill him and to get them. I—killed him, but he—I mean Winscombe—frightened me away. I—went back last night and—got this. That's all. I—I believe in her—”

His head fell back. The eyes closed. Judge Segrue placed his arm beneath the head, which moved slowly once or twice. A long sigh came from the lips.

Judge Segrue spread his handkerchief over the face. He rose to his feet; his hand fell on Hollis's shoulder.

“He believed in her,” he said gravely. “You must believe, too.”

The silence of death within the club room was broken by the sound of wheels outside. A wagon stopped before the door. Out of it stepped a middle aged man, who came quickly up the steps, and halted in the entrance in stupefaction at the scene.

Judge Segrue went quickly to him and shook him by the hand.

“I'm glad you came, Pettibone,” he said.

He turned to Hollis.

“This is my friend who received the confession from the forger,” he said. “Mr. Pettibone, will you come with me and Mr. Hollis and tell him what you know about that, and—make him believe?”

MARY knelt at Chester's bedside and drew his arm about her. “He believes,” she whispered. “Shall we two believe—forever?”



No, Indeed!

Life is real and life is earnest,
And the gaol is not its goal!

Beat Him to It

Hankins: I had no idea you were going to marry that little widow.

Jankins: No more did I. The idea was hers.

A Futurist

Fortune teller: You will be married four times, miss.

Actress: I want to know the future, not the past.

An Accustomed Burden

All the pall-bearers were bankers

At the funeral of Silas Gow.

"We carried him all through life," they said,

"And so we will carry him now."

Comfy!

Doctor: I can't make out your wife's case at all, sir. She seems to have lumbago, rheumatic joints and gout, a sprained neck and a curved spine.

Billkins: I know what it is, Doc. She was reading in our cozy corner and fell asleep.

In Russia

"What is the national song of the Russian bolshevists?"

"I'm forever blowing roubles!"

A Standing Joke

The boy stood on the burning deck,

He stood it very well;

He had to stand a lot, by heck—

He lived in New Rochelle!

Interpreting the Einstein Theory

In connection with recent earthquakes in Mexico and California, a darky preacher in Houston, Texas, has evolved an ingenious theory which, one must admit, fits very well existing circumstances. He addressed his flock as follows:

"Breddern an' sisters, we have received annudder warnin' not to go pesticatorin' into de ways ob Providence. De earf, bred-dern, revolutes on its axles, an' it takes a right sma't ob grease to keep it lubricated. So de good Lord put petroleum inside de earf to keep de axles greased.

"Den, bye an' bye, long come all dese hyah ile companies, punchin' holes in de ground clear down into de bearin's, and quensecontly all de ile come squirtin' out. Fust thing we know dere's a hot box an' de earf squeaks an' rumbles an' grunts an' dat's de earfquake. If dey don't quit it purty soon dere won't be no moah grease left and de earf will stick tight on its axles an' won't go 'round no moah."



Drawn for Wayside Tales by J. I. Wagner

Jed: Old Sponger claims he could drink any number of high-balls.

Ed: He could—any given number!

Announcing the Films

"The Dictionary." Will hold you spell-bound!

"Needles and Pins." With many good points!

"Suicide." Will make you forget your troubles!

"My Lady's Mirror." Worth looking into!

"The Opium Pipe." Will set you dreaming!

"Come Seven! Come Eleven!" A rattling success!

"The Strangler." A gripping sensation!

"The Pickpocket." Watch out for this one!

"The Scalp Message." A hair-raising feature!

"The Pardoned Convict." Just released!

The Wrong Size

Mrs. Newmotor: Mr. Gasse, I want you to put some of that Everlasting air in the tires. That kind you put in yesterday flattened right out in no time.

Mr. Gasse: My mistake, lady. I put in 30x3 air, and your tires are 35x5!

The War Path

Flapper: Pleased to meet you, Mr. Spotted Eagle Feather. But tell me, why do you paint your face like that?

Spotted Eagle Feather: Same like you, Miss. Paint um face and go after um white guy's scalp.

Next to Nothing at All

Voice (over the phone): What's going on tonight, Biffkins?

Biffkins: Very little—my wife's dressing for the ball.

Scotland Yard

I see a building ominous and gray,
With cat-eyed windows looking on the night,
Across whose green and scrutinizing sight,
Fantastic shadows race in frantic play.

Dim scoundrels, unfamiliar with the day,
Slip through the dark in animated flight,
Pursued by men invincibly polite,
Who puff at pipes and haven't much to say.

Inside, the click of secret panels, stairs
That climb in dizzy flight to sudden nooks,
And noiseless doors that open unawares,
Revealing silent men with gravid looks—

I learned all this at night, in rocking chairs,

Surrounded by a multitude of books.
Vincent Starrett.



Drawn for Wayside Tales by Chester I. Garde

Slightly Jingled Golfer: Now I s'pose you're goin' tell me y' sank that one for a birdie!

With the Accent on the First Syllable

He: Among all soldiers the sharpshooters are the best natured.

She: Shoot—!

He: Because they actually cultivate aimiability.

A Lim(b)erick

A fair maiden, named Peggy Rousseau,
Had ultra short skirts in her trousseau.

When asked why, sweet Pegs

Looked down at her—,

Well, at her two reasons to dousseau.

Business Surgery

Customer: This car is \$1100 now and a year ago you asked \$1800 for it. What's the idea?

Agent: Increased operations, sir. We cut off the overhead to put the business on its feet. Then we cut down the catalog expense by removing the appendix. Finally we lopped off all the dead-wood by firing the block-heads in the office force, and there you are.

Madness and Method

Consuelo's eyes are gray!

(Eloise is rich!)

Maud can on the banjo play!

(Eloise is rich!)

Ethel is extremely wise,

Betty makes the finest pies,

Anna won a beauty prize!

(Eloise is rich!)

Daisy's hair is golden-brown!

(Eloise is rich!)

Kate's the cutest girl in town!

(Eloise is rich.)

Each and ev'ry one of these

Seven could a fellow please,

But I've chosen Eloise—

Eloise is rich!

Harold Seton.

Pause and Effect

"Nowadays—"

"Go on—'Nowadays'—"

"A chat with a taxi chauffeur will drive a man to drink."



Drawn for Wayside Tales by P. R. Carmack

Bobby's dream, after a very successful day of snowballing unsuspecting gentlemen!

Out of Season

Patron: What's that? This watch will not be repaired until next May?

Jeweler: Sorry, sir, but you see, a spring cleaning is necessary.

Blowers—Safe and Unsafe

"Take stick-up men, for example——"

"Yes, what of them?"

"Most stick-up men were originally of the class that were too stuck up to stock up when they *did* have employment!"

Film Up, Boys!

"Then there's the case (if one's enough) of the actor——"

"Yes——"

"It has been proved that the sudden fall of an actor may be often attributed to his ryes.

Picking 'Em

Briggs: Brooks is mighty lucky picking the winners at the races.

Griggs: Why shouldn't he be? He had a job with the Weather Bureau, and before that he used to be a prescription clerk in a drug store!

Knight Thoughts

"When knighthood was in flower," you know,

The world was young and green;
And sword clashed sword, and lance
crossed lance,
For maid of stately mien.

In knighthood's blossoming I fear
Love suffered many blights.
Their way of "saying it with flowers,"
Was death to blooming knights!
Blanche Elizabeth Wade.



Drawn for Wayside Tales by G. Francis Kauffman

"It would be better if they had never met!"

Answered

Enraged wife: You will either divulge the name of the other woman or answer a divorce suit!

Cowering husband: Sue!

But Nearly Every One!

Bride: Now, you did not have someone to kiss you every night before you were married.

Groom: No, not every night.



Drawn for Wayside Tales by G. Francis Kaufmann

THE GURGLING BLUES

Dad put an abrupt stop to Eleanor's beau's saxophone efforts by sending little Roderick into the room sucking a lemon!

What He Needed

When Farmer Bassett decided to send his son to college, and selected one exploiting the advantages of its physical training system, he had a plain talk with the president.

"John don't need no setting-up exercises. He sets up too late already, so I'd ruther you'd cut them out. But say, if you've got any good *getting* up exercises that are a sure thing, go to it with John!"

The Modern Maiden to the Mere Man

Old dear, if you are bound to try

The marriage game with me,
I hope you realize that I
Must be completely free.

I'll dine or dance with whom I choose;
Where do you get that noise?
You can't expect me to refuse
Good dates with pleasing boys!

I think I'll use my maiden name,
But if you're kind—and meek—
I'll love you with a white-hot flame
At breakfast—twice a week.

Laura Lee Randall.

The Other Feller

Though her thanks filled a sheet,

Yet I do not feel happy;
Though my heart's at her feet,
Though her thanks filled a sheet,
For the roses ("so sweet")

Were from *some other chappie*;
Though her thanks filled a sheet,
Yet I do not feel happy!

La Touche Hancock.

Pruneville Personals

Just when Os Peachblow had saved enough money to get a new pair of suspenders somebody stole his pants.

Mrs. Gabe Saddler is suffering with enlargement of the photograph.

Pluto Plum's hat is missing. He discovered the loss this afternoon when he went to tip it to a young lady.

Gabe Saddler is home from Hickory Heights with the report that the tannery up there is running one hundred per cent normal.

Leslie Van Every.

The New Flower

"What is your husband's favorite flower?"

"Dazes—he's located some moonshine!"

The Safe Way

"You should be careful about cracking jokes at other people's expense!"

"Why?"

"Not to overdraw the account!"

Ego

"Then you add twenty pounds of corn meal," said Malone

To McCullough and me—

"Let it ripen, and see

If it doesn't excite every creaky old bone
Till you shout your delight in mellifluous tone!

Why, everyone knows you

Can't find an ambrosia

That touches, by Hector, this nectar I own!"

But McCullough looked up with a withering stare—

"When it comes to home brew,"

He declared, "both of you

Are the rankest of amateurs! Why, I declare,

The stuff that I make has one treading on air!

One snifter, I say,

And you're Queen of the May,

With smilax and lilacs entwined in your hair!"

"Disgusting!" I cried, "to have fallen so low

As the home manufacture

Of stuff that would fracture

The stomach of Bacchus himself—when I know

The only *real method* by which one may go
About making a booze

That will slip you a snooze

That makes opium look like an amateur show!"

D. S. Knowlton.



Drawn for Wayside Tales by Jim Henderson

A nifty plan of interior decorating for women whose husbands spend all their time at the grocery!

His Career

There was a young person named Ted;
Automobiling had gone to his head;

Wreathed in gasoline smiles,

He sped thousands of miles,
And he'll probably scorch when he's dead!

The Real Cause for Complaint

The maid had been using surreptitiously the bath tub of her employer, an elderly bishop. He was a bachelor, very fastidious about his toilet, and desired the exclusive use of his tub.

He reprimanded the maid with much indignation:

"What distresses me most, Mary, is that you have done this behind my back."



Drawn for Wayside Tales by J. H. Fyfe

AS THE ADVERTISING MAN WOULD HAVE IT

"10 a. m. on blue Monday with a Slopper Washing Machine in the laundry and a Flopper Fireless Cooker in the kitchen."

Motor Wisdom!

I know two birds both motor wise,
I marvel at their lore;
Now Cuthbert Jones can tell the whys
Of mileage, stroke and bore.

His friend, Perce Smith, is just as wise
But figures in the smile;

Cuth knows how many miles per gal.,
Perce knows the gals per mile.

Practice Makes Perfect

First golfer: See Jones, over there?
Swear, why that man can——

Second golfer: When alone can swear
to a tee, eh?



Drawn for Wayside Tales by Cobb X. Shinn

ARITHMETIC IN JUNGLE TOWN

"Now, children, add these two numbers, and what's the answer?"

Funny is No Name

"Funny about girls."

"Yes—go on."

"Some must be kissed before they will make up and others want to make up before they are kissed!"

The Sec Dynasty

Higgins: This era will go down in history—

Jiggins: As the one where a guy even had to carry his optimism in his hip pocket.

In the "Treat 'Em Rough" Days

The Stone Age Literary Society was holding its annual meeting and the discussion had turned to complexions.

"I just adore black eyes!" said Miss Woodenclub, impulsively.

"Aha!" exclaimed Peter Stonehatchet, from the rear of the cave, "you're the girl for me."

In the Big Chair!

Ned: I proposed to Hope, but she refused me.

Ted: What's the situation now?

Ned: Well, she still allows me to hope against Hope!

When a Fellar Needs a Friend

(With apologies to Briggs)

The little pond is frozen,
Which Jimmy boy elates—
He rushes to the cellar
To get his old ice-skates.

He knows just where he threw them
Last year when came the thaw,
And on his face a grin spreads
That nearly splits his jaw.

But when he hits the cellar,
From him all joy doth ooze—
He finds his dad has piled on
His skates, ten crates of booze.

F. P. Pitzer.



Drawn for Wayside Tales by Marshall D. Smith

The girl, with a giggle: Sport stockings, eh? What exercise would I get wearing them?
The salesman: Well, you probably would have a run in them some day!

"Thus Conscience Doth Make Cowards of Us All"

Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
"I'll take a ginger ale instead!"

Both Hands Busy

Hill: Cohen should make a capable
director in this studio.

Dale: Yes—but who would hold his
megaphone for him?

It's Born In 'Em!

Little girl: Mother, when I get to
heaven, will I play with the little angels?

Mother: Yes, darling, you will.

Little girl: And don't you fink, mother,
if I'm very, *very* dood, they will let me
play with a lickle devil sometimes?

The Narrow Way

"I don't see how you manage to live
within your income, Jones. Aren't you
cramped?"

"Cramped is no name for it! I have to
go out and borrow five dollars every time
I want to stretch."

The Difference

"Mrs. Spender's husband seems bent
with pain!"

"No, only with payin'!"

A Present Help

The writer: Listen, old man, can you
loan me a ten spot? I don't get my salary
until tomorrow.

The artist: Sorry, old top, but I
haven't a nickel. I got mine yesterday.

EVENING AND SUNDAY MORNING

ESTABLISHED OCTOBER 2, 1902

THE LINCOLN STAR

Nebraska's Best Newspaper

HERBERT E. GOOCH,
PRESIDENTL. B. TOBIN,
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AUDIT BUREAU OF CIRCULATIONS
AMERICAN NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASS'N

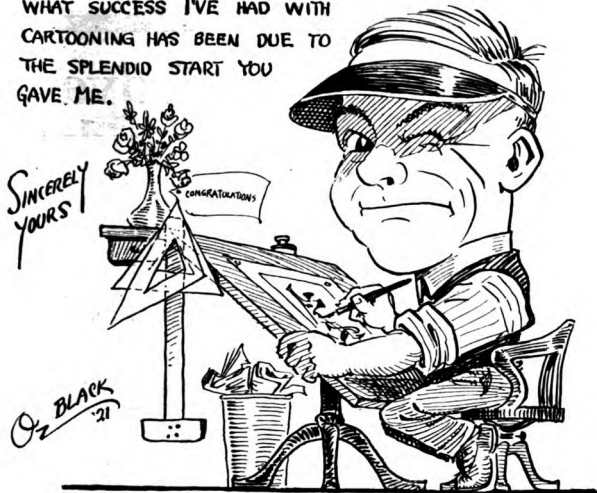
LINCOLN, NEBR.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT
J. E. LAWRENCE,
MANAGING EDITOR

DEAR EVANS —

OCTOBER 25, 1921.

I DON'T BELIEVE I'D BE SITTING
HERE TODAY IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR YOUR
COURSE. I CAN STILL TRUTHFULLY SAY THAT
WHAT SUCCESS I'VE HAD WITH
CARTOONING HAS BEEN DUE TO
THE SPLENDID START YOU
GAVE ME.



DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW?

One of the objects in printing this letter is to show you what can be accomplished during your spare time.

OZ BLACK is CARTOONIST for the LINCOLN STAR. He studied cartooning, under W. L. EVANS, when he was going to school and college. He only worked at his lessons during his spare moments. Sometimes it was four or five months between lessons.

If you like to draw don't waste your time by drawing merely "funny pictures." You can have just as much fun learning how to draw REAL CARTOONS.

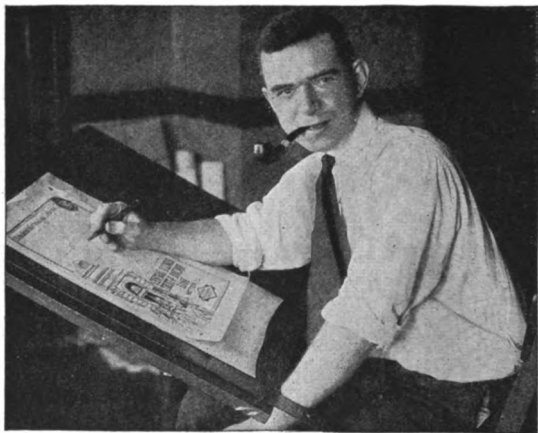
Some of the cleverest cartoonists are former pupils. This school is recommended by cartoonists because they know the students are taught in the right way. CARTOONIST EVANS' careful individual method of instructing and criticising is bound to produce results. The course is not expensive. Write for full details. Please send a small sample of your work.

THE W. L. EVANS SCHOOL OF CARTOONING

"The school that has the reputation"

822 LEADER BUILDING, CLEVELAND, OHIO

Nash Witten, a Federal student, at work in his studio.



How Witten Won Advancement Through Study

NASH A. WITTEN had been working since the war, as a designer for a pictorial road sign company in Virginia. But Witten felt that his talent was misplaced. He knew that he was capable of bigger things in Commercial Art. Witten had a job but he wanted advancement on "the road to bigger things."

To work out his determination to succeed, Witten enrolled in the Federal School of Illustrating and Cartooning. He specialized in advertising illustration, diligently working out the sections written by such men as D. J. Lavin, Herbert Johnson, and other leaders in advertising illustration.

Study Brings Success

It was not long before Witten's study began to bring him profit.

Long before he completed the course he was making advertising illustrations for commercial concerns throughout the south.

With the co-operation of Bart, Dean of the Federal Schools, Witten made a connection with the Hahn-Rodenburg Co., Publicity Counselors at Springfield, Ill., executing their interesting line of individual trademark border designs for newspaper advertising service.

To continue the story in Witten's own words, he says: "I heartily thank the Federal Schools for the assistance given in placing me here. I am making good with the Hahn-Rodenburg Co., and find the work most agreeable. The Federal School lessons have helped me to go ahead in the drawing with new courage and greater confidence in my ultimate success."

Are You In a Rut? Get Out of It!

Are you content to travel in a rut someone else has dug for you? Snap out of it! Your future is in your own hands if you will but make the determination to make the most of your opportunity. America's greatest men started out in life with less advantage and lower station in life than you possess. They made good because they took advantage of their opportunities.

You, too, can succeed if you will but lift yourself out of the rut by developing your talent. If your talent is in the field of art the Federal School of Illustrating and Cartooning is your best guarantee of a successful future.

Nash Witten still would be in the sign painting rut, an average man at average pay, had he not determined that he was capable of bigger things. Witten's case is but typical

of hundreds of Federal students. You, too, can achieve by realizing to the fullest extent on your ability. Make up your mind, today, to investigate and find out how.

60 Leading Artists Show You How

Through the Federal Course in Illustrating and Cartooning more than 60 of America's leading artists show you the way to success. Every step of your progress is explained to you, charted and illustrated by a famous

artist who excels in that particular phase of the work. The secrets and methods of these successful men learned by them through long years of hard work are explained in detail to you to hasten your progress and ultimate success.

Federal Training Will Win Success for You

With a belief in your ability to succeed and a determination to train your drawing talent, you, too, can become a successful artist.

If you have drawing talent, you can easily become proficient under the guidance of

America's leading artists who gladly teach you their secrets and methods.

Get out of the rut! Put yourself in line for a man sized income! Become proficient in drawing by learning right in your own home in your spare time! Determine today to find out how you can do it.

Get This Book of Opportunities

Opportunities in the art world were never better than right now. The field for trained illustrators and cartoonists is uncrowded. Send for a free copy of our book, "A Road to Bigger Things." This book tells of opportunities in the art world and how you can qualify. It tells how many famous artists made the start that won them fame and fortune.

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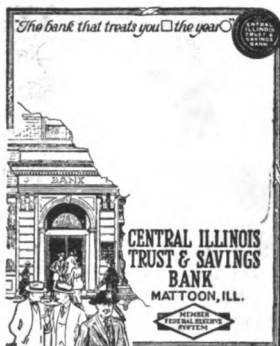
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Please send by return mail my free copy of "A Road to Bigger Things" together with "Success Through Illustrating" and complete information about the Federal School of Illustrating and Cartooning.

Name..... Age..... Occupation.....

Address.....

City and State.....



A sample of the kind of commercial illustrating that is winning success for Nash Witten.



FEDERAL SCHOOL NEWS

A RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT IN
ILLUSTRATING AND CARTOONING

EDITED BY

CHAS. L. BARTHOLOMEW

Bart



FLEET BURT

FLEET BURT is now employed in the art department of the Columbus Citizen, handling the layouts and general art work. He is fortunate in being associated with Harry Keys, the cartoonist. Fleet took the place on the Citizen of Arthur Martin, another Federal student, who has taken a position in Chicago.

tion in Chicago.

CHARLES PLUMB appeared in the December 17th issue of the Country Gentleman with an illustration of the American farmer. Along with this piece of news came a copy of the Chicago "Missourian" showing a picture of Charley and his new bride.



SAM E. NASH

SAM E. NASH is meeting with great success in his caricatures of local celebrities in the Tyler (Texas) Tribune. He reports marked improvement in his drawing since enrollment, and is enthusiastic about the Federal course.

GRANT POWERS, who was sent back to France by the government to make sketches for replicas of the ruined areas, is now official cartoonist on the front page of "The Stars and Stripes."



ROSS HATTON

ROSS HATTON, of Omaha, has been interesting labor publications in his cartoons, having sold a number to "Midwest Labor News," "New Day" and "Omaha Tribune" at a good price. The editor of the "New Day" (Milwaukee) says of Hatton: "His style is a direct one, lacking the confusion and false drawing that get into so many radical cartoons."

sion and false drawing that get into so many radical cartoons."

D. RAY BABCOCK has opened an independent studio of commercial illustrating in Norwalk, Ohio, and is busily engaged in design and show card work. He has for a client the Roberts Coffee Company of Cleveland, making demonstrating cards for Clark's Coffee.



RAY C. BABCOCK

KEITH JOHNSON, Jackson Tenn., has cartoons appearing from time to time in the Memphis Commercial Appeal, and he recently took first honors in black and white drawing at the Tennessee Fair. He is getting more work than he can handle in his sign shop outside of school hours.

IVAN ZENGLER of Milwaukee has just returned from a year's tour in vaudeville in a "musical chalk-talk" act, with the Kenton Revue, which proved quite profitable for him. He hopes that he will find time enough in the next few months before starting out again to get back on the lesson work, of which he has completed the first quarter.



IVAN ZENGLER

EDWARD STACK puts in his spare time after his railroad work, as assistant to Cartoonist Harper of the Birmingham "Age Herald." His cartoons have recently been appearing on the sport page.

JOHN HENDRY, who started the course while in St. Paul, is in Chicago in the commercial art field. He recently sold drawings to Cartoons Magazine, and is doing general free-lancing in his spare time.



JOHN HENDRY

Get a Bart Drawing Table

Adjustable to every need of the practical draftsman, illustrator, card writer, cartoonist, and chalk talker, the Bart table and chalk talk equipment starts you in these most fascinating callings.

You need Bart's special crayon for practice and public performance. Description of table and prices sent on request.

50c Special Offer

For 50c Bart sends you an assortment of the famous American Crayon Company's colors. (This company is the original maker of chalk talk crayons.) Bart will also

send his "Do's and Don'ts of Chalk Talk" and pictures of Sid Smith and Clare Briggs producing their famous characters in crayon—"Andy Gump," "Min," "Skinny," and "When a Feller Needs a Friend."

Send for these today

For 6c in Stamps

Enclose 6c in stamps for Bart's chalk talk folder, color card and Sid Smith's alphabetic faces.



The Bart Table in Use for Chalk Talk



The Bart Table in Use by an Illustrative Draftsman—It Fits Each Drawing Requirement

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Just Like the Hawaiians!

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I have finished all the lessons and can play better than I ever dreamed I could. Your way of teaching can't be beat. Anyone can learn who will even half try. I think your way of teaching is wonderful. **ELVEN EDDY, EUGENE, OREGON.**

Practised the lesson four times, and can play Aloha. **H. GUFFY, ALLAN, OHIO.**

Learned the first lesson from memory in a very short time. Lessons are not at all difficult. **EDITH HERS, STORY CITY, IOWA.**

I am certainly well pleased. **MISS OMA WOODIN, AKRON, OHIO.**

Getting a great deal of pleasure out of my guitar. **STARR ROSE, TONOPAH, NEVADA.**

Lessons are simple and easy to learn. **WILLIAM C. KERN, ANN ARBOR, MICH.**

I find it very simple to learn. Instructions are clear. **ESTINAH BOWLAND, MENDON, OHIO.**

I don't see how any He man can do without one. **PVT. THOS. B. SADLER, FT. HANCOCK, N. J.**

Learned first lesson perfectly the first day I had. **A. C. HEDGECOCK, MILWAUKEE, WISC.**

Am well satisfied with my guitar and lessons. **EVERETT DAY, MANCHESTER, N. H.**

Our method of teaching is so simple, plain and easy that you begin on a piece with your first lesson. In half an hour you can play it! We have reduced the necessary motions you learn to only four—and you acquire these in a few minutes. Then it is only a matter of practice to acquire the weird, fascinating tremolos, staccatos, slurs, and other effects that make this instrument so delightful. The Hawaiian Guitar plays any kind of music, both the melody and the accompaniment. Our complete course of 52 lessons includes a beautiful Hawaiian Guitar, all the necessary **FREE** picks and steel bar and 52 pieces of music. **Special arrangements for lessons if you have your own instrument.**



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OH, MAN!

Includes the cream of the famous cartoons: Someone Is Always Taking the Joy Out of Life; It Happens in the Best Regulated Families; Ain't It a Grand and Glorious Feeling; A Handy Man Around the House, and others. Supplemented with characteristic thumb-nail sketches by Briggs and a brilliant foreword by Franklin P. Adams, one of the leading humorists of the country.

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Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It helps to quiet the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of **Tobacco Redeemer** treatment for the habit.

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A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If **Tobacco Redeemer** fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

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If you are a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you from the habit.

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Street and No.....

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Nervous System**



**Tobacco Ruins
Digestion**



**Tobacco Stunts
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**Tobacco Restores
Man of Vitality**



**Tobacco Steals
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forts, Luxuries
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